At Their Mercy

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by Devcipher

Summary

The multiverse had been perfectly balanced when the seven higher beings weaved it together. Through countless interferences, however, the balance has begun to tip, and stability is threatened. Fate's creation has been unresponsive to their warnings, and thus a solution must be made. While feuding with Destiny over a monster to be Ink's counterpart, Karma intervenes.

Inspiration from Harrish6's Forced God of Destruction universe, but a unique alternate multiverse/universe of my own.

Discord is constantly breaking the link for the ATM discord but: https://discord.gg/DgHWGnMNrs *EDIT: My server got raided twice please message me for a link lol*

Tumblr: https://www.tumblr.com/devtemrys

Notes

A/N:

I had debated heavily on doing this type of thing after reading so many good (and bad) stories of a similar subject. As far as the forced god of destruction stuff, I always felt sad about how Error's entire story was. So, of course, I made my own because I like things to be happy. All of these things are just for fun, so any story or cannon behind any certain AU or character will be adjusted or ignored. Anyhow, have fun.

Prologue

When the multiverse breathed its first sign of life, the vastness of it seemed to be endless. Within the blank space that spread through the area, there was nothing. Between that universe, and perhaps between that of time as well, ruled a council. These higher beings gave way to the multiverse, caringly weaving it together in collaboration with one another.

Time: laying the base of the foundation to bring the universe from a standstill. Fate: spun tightly to hold together the inevitable as the universe matures. Destiny: stitching together with Fate to balance what will, what must, what can, and what cannot. Faith: lovingly stenciled upon the world to motivate and inspire all who may inhabit it one day. Hope: strengthening the fabric of the universe to withstand even the harshest of conditions. Karma: a loose thread, where a single pull to test its integrity may lead to consequences and reactions to all who try. And, of course, Magic: imbibing the material together and giving way to incredible phenomena that gave the multiverse properties and possibilities beyond that of comprehension.

Together, each wove and stitched until the multiverse was perfect. Perfectly balanced and... empty. This did not last, however. From the emptiness, these higher beings encouraged the formation of first life; the first, and only, universe shaped by each of their hands. This universe, the original creation, was simply known as Undertale. The tale of the monsters and humans living together in peace was a beautiful story, but it was merely the prelude to the story.

It was the Destiny of the monsters to be sealed away under the mountain, Mt. Ebott, after a brutal war. Though refugees of war, through their will and with the help of Magic from the monsters, they were able to establish a home. Though crowded and hidden away from the Sun, monsters held tight to their Faith that they would be free. That their angel that had seen the surface would come and free them all. The king and queen took in a fallen human child their son had found and called them their own. The royal family brought Hope to all monsters and humans. The pressure soon bared down upon the two royal children; constantly being told and reminded that they were the future of monsters and humans. The two children perished after taking this responsibility too far; a faulty plan to go above ground to collect human souls. That, of course, was only the surface of the story. The fallen human wished to destroy their village, to deliver Karma to

those they had known. Their sibling, who had absorbed their soul, had resisted, and returned back underground, where they dusted soon after. As Time passed, more and more humans fell until six souls rested in wait to be used to break the barrier.

The final human child to fall below marked the maturity of the universe, established stability after flourishing for many years. It came with a few hiccups as well, minus perhaps those that had gotten too curious for their own good. The Void was formed soon after, engulfing those who had fallen between time and space. There only appeared to be one resident, for now. Other than a few minor bumps, it was perfect. Until the deities began to interfere with their multiverse.

The first to do so was Fate, who grew discontent with the way the universe unfolded before them.

As the final human fell, they navigated through the Ruins and killed monsters as they encountered them. They appeared confused and afraid as they encountered them, which slowly eased as they continued their journey. Most monsters were spared after leaving the ruins, but the outcome of the story was unfulfilling. The human left the Underground after killing the king, their subsequent struggle with Flowey causing the remaining souls to vanish. The monsters were left hopeless with no souls, lost family members, and no way out.

Fate was unsatisfied with this, too unsatisfied to allow the story to continue on. While the human, and before them the vessel flower of the prince, had been able to essentially reset time backward, it was extremely limited. Time had closely monitored the limits of this power, unwilling to let the balance tip too far by allowing large skips backward. They had what were essential "checkpoints" that the two had been able to use. This way, there was a set parameter that they could jump to rather than recklessly throwing time in reverse. Seeing that this system would not help change the outcome, Fate traveled beyond the veil separating the universe from their plane. They reached into the world and granted a way for the fallen human to change the Fate of the Underground. They called this a "true reset", where they could begin again from the moment they fell Underground.

The other deities were outraged by the action, condemning them for manipulating their perfect universe. Time had been the most disgusted, having had their timeline unwound and splintered off into multiple directions. What was done was done, however, and the beings could only watch as the human experiment with the world.

Exploring, resetting, repeating actions, and trying to find new paths and things they had missed before. The child would show mercy one moment, then kill another just to see what would happen, how things would change. Seeing this spiral, Karma was the next to interfere.

Within the universe, Magic had appointed a monster to serve as a judge for the souls that passed through their world. It made sense to Karma, then, to bless this monster with the power to serve proper justice to those who did *not* pass judgment. They called this "Karmic Retribution", a power that fed on the sins clinging to the target's soul. This power gave the judge greater recollection of the unfolded events, allowing them a better means to judge actions that the other may attempt to erase. Upon return, Karma would hear nothing of the protests for further interfering with this universe. To them, this perfectly balanced the damage that had been done.

Fate, bitter from being challenged on their meddling, began to structure their own being instead. If the others would not let them create the world as they saw fit, they would make someone who would. They molded this being after the judge of the created universe within a plane simply dubbed the anti-void. It was meant to be unreachable for those who could not pass through planes of existence. Though imperfect and soulless, Fate loved the small monster they had created. They named the being Ink, a testament to the creative abilities they had imbibed them with. As they breathed life into this creation, they whispered their Fate to them in that white void. They whispered his name, his Fate, and cautionary to the limitations of both his power and this multiverse. The monster, Ink, seemed to have only retained his name.

Destiny became jealous of the deity, seeing the blessed monster perfecting the ability to create masterpieces and, eventually, entire worlds. Destiny began to weave their own universe in response, giving it much more care and precision than the hasty hands of Fate. It wasn't too difficult to implement the same structure as the first universe, but the tricky part was altering its pattern of it. Why should it be this world's destiny to suffer under the earth? Though a few deities disapproved of this, mainly Fate and Time, others were more curious or unbothered by it. Hope and Faith even took a special interest in this world, finding joy seeing a world filled with more dreams and optimism. If asked why Destiny spent so much time creating the judge of that universe, they would simply say that they had "such momentous plans" for this monster.

Things began to go wrong.

Fate's little child had begun to make universes as he was designed to do. After encountering the original universe, he became inspired to make alternate realities of them close by. These alternative universes began to appear through exciting strokes of paint and magic. The first few were simple, such as a role reversal universe dubbed Underswap. Then there was the disturbing pattern the creator fell into of creating dystopian realities. Underfell was the first universe that the creator displayed his lack of empathy. With no soul, there came no real emotions other than a faint echo of a feeling from time to time. These could be amplified through vials of paint that he had been created with, but it was no substitute for real emotions.

Perhaps the most unfortunate experiment was the tale of Dreamtale, where the creator created a universe for the balance of positivity and negativity. Though not a god himself, Ink could still give these universes monsters that were very much almost deity-like without truly being immortal or all-powerful. When a universe was first created, Ink would often leave it to develop and grow upon the story he had written for it for quite a while before checking in on it. This was not the case with Dreamtale, as it was almost a personal project. He would observe the universe and the twin beings that guarded the tree of feelings. The bright positive Dream was created to be the contrast to the secluded Nightmare.

Ink favoured the positive being and had made sure the story was always in his favour. Nightmare was often left alone and uncared for by the other inhabitants, who saw no need for the negative feelings he brought. Isolation turned into hostility as Ink began to change the story little by little in a dark fascination of what would happen. Much like their creator, Fate, he too could quickly grow bored of the same story. Perhaps that was why he was always creating. As the torment became worse and worse, he decided to throw in a plot twist. What if he pushed the other to consume the dark apples? What would happen? In the end, as Nightmare consumed the apples out of terrified desperation, he became warped in negativity. He was left screaming and pleading as he drowned in a dark abyss of manifested negativity. Dream managed to secure the last golden apple, keeping the balance from tipping completely. After encasing his brother in stone, Nightmare vanished entirely from the destroyed universe.

To say the deities were outraged would be an understatement.

Through swift action and intervention, the universe gained a new element of balance. The balance between positivity and negativity, of dark and light. Hope and Faith showered their blessings upon the

encased monster so he may one day protect this delicate balance. Karma found fault in all parties involved and marked each of them equally. Perhaps not soon, but one day they would each encounter their rightfully earned retribution. Magic had been forced to intervene to keep such a disaster from happening again. Ink could not be allowed to create beings so vastly powerful or in the likeness of a deity, and Magic made it so. To compensate, Magic was forced to create a land of demi-gods to help control the balances made. This was simply referred to as Reapertale, seeing as the main need was for Death to corral the influx of souls from the destroyed universe. This universe was shaped by Magic, Time, Destiny, and Karma. After its creation, Magic vanished. The multiverse was still upheld, and magic still imbibed the beings of the universes, so they were still alive somewhere within it.

The warnings that had been whispered to Ink had gone unheard, as every day the multiverse was filled with new universes and, after time, even copies of already existing universes. Fate began to fear for the stability of this multiverse if it began to overflow. The only obvious solution in their mind was to create a counterpart to balance out the creation. There must be one of destruction to keep the multiverse from filling up. While there was no danger anytime soon of overcrowding, the problem was best solved early. Fate, knowing the mistakes they made from their first creation, decided to simply "borrow" an existing one instead to fill this role. Carelessly, they ripped the judge from Destiny's lovingly crafted world, causing its stability to collapse and, consequently, the universe to end. Destiny quickly intervened, attempting to drag their precious creation back as they were taken. After a power struggle and far too much power fed into this monster to attempt to take control, another intervened.

Karma, disgusted and infuriated by the actions taken, seized the being for themselves. They cast away the two jealous deities and mended the monster they had so viciously shaped. The being was far too powerful to be placed into a new universe, the touch and blessings of three deities leaving this creature virtually a god. Having had a hand in this, Karma took pity upon this creation that was now on the same level as themselves. Karma severed the ties of the anti-void, disallowing access to it for any other being unless explicitly permitted by Karma themselves or the young deity.

Karma stayed with the monster, a skeletal monster much like most of the judges of the universes. The bones of this monster were stained black from the constant touch of celestial beings before being brought to such a state themself. Golden lines wrapped up the arms of the

being like ley lines, pulsing and thrumming with the power it held. Robes of blue covered much of the monster, with golden embroidery lovingly stitched into the material. Karma's symbol marked the back of the ancient robe and the frontal bone of the monster.

Through time, Karma helped the monster to discover and perfect their powers while drilling into them the responsibility and implications that came with them. Unlike Ink, the monster seemed to take this very seriously. The tales of the multiverse brought pain to the monster's soul and they wished to help this plane to find peace and balance. Karma felt a warmth of pride in the kindness and mercy of this monster. With a final cautionary warning, Karma withdrew from the planes of existence and left the monster to live their life.

This is how Erratum came to be.

Chapter 1: Interfering

Chapter Summary

> After countless years of elective isolation to hone their powers, Erratum ventures out into the multiverse to explore. They wind up affecting it way more than they intended to.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

This world was… as depressing as Erratum had expected it to be.

It was obvious when Dreamtale was laid to waste, no one bothered to come to clean up the mess. Dust and blood were still staining the dead grass around the area, and the tree of feelings lay fallen at the base. The god pitied the state of the place and pitied the solidified monster before them.

Dream still stood, frozen in time, encased in stone. His brother had sealed him away, but unable to safely extract the last golden apple, left him. It was obvious it had been for quite a long time by the state of the universe. Erratum had assumed the creator would have come by now to fix this world or, at the very least, release the monster before them. There were no signs that anyone had been in this world since that day, however.

Erratum tilted their head to the side, observing how the statue seemed to occasionally leak golden liquid from its petrified eyes.

It truly was a pity.

Nightmare, as far as the god was able to gather, was still out there spreading negativity. The further the balance tipped, the more

powerful the negative being became. Ever one for balance, Erratum had come to see if Dream had still been encased as their guardian had described. It seemed so.

Erratum silently reached their hand out, wiping at the golden tears that stained the weathered stone. From their touch, a crack in the surface of the stone appeared. They stared at this crack, wondering how they could have possibly done that with the gentle pressure they applied. Still, the split continued to travel, spreading down the expanse of stone.

Well, this was not supposed to happen. This was not good.

They hadn't *meant* to interfere with the natural process of this world. Though, considering the state of it, was it really going through a natural process? If Dream hadn't returned to his form by now, what were the chances he could do it without outside forces? Regardless, what was done was done. The only thing to do now was back off and observe from afar. This was the creator, Ink's, favourite little universe, and he was probably already alerted that there had been a shift. It was time to leave before there was an inevitable confrontation.

Erratum reached their hand out, dividing the fabric of reality with ease. Golden threads seemed to pull back the space before them, leading away into another world. They whirled their head around as the sound of crumbling stone reached their ear, or whatever semblance the opening in their skull was to an ear. Dream was on his hands and knees, seemingly gasping for air he hadn't had in what seemed like eons. Erratum quickly made their way through the opening they had created, glancing back through the portal as Dream looked up. They quickly closed it, leaving the positive being behind.

Dream *swore* he saw someone just now. Faint colours of black and blue seemed to disappear before he could focus on it. Perhaps he was

just hallucinating after years trapped within the stone prison.

Stone prison.

He gasped, pulling himself up to his feet as he surveyed the area. Nausea flooded him as he covered his mouth with one hand. The village, all those he had once protected and helped, were slaughtered. The remains of them were scattered in bits and pieces along with various traces of dust that hadn't been blown away.

He turned slowly to view the tree, his mother, and was greeted by an equally grim sight. What was left was merely a stump, a lifeless tombstone to what he once held dear. He fell once more to his knees, crawling to the stump that was once his mother. He rested the top of his body against the wood, weeping openly against it. Everything he had once held dear was gone, completely gone. He was alone.

He jolted once more as the sound of what he could only describe as bubbling filled the area. Pulling away from the fallen tree, he witnessed a puddle of black ink coalesce and gurgle upon the ground. It seemed to slowly rise and take a more solid form as it did. Eventually, he was left staring at a quite colourful skeleton much like himself. He cautiously rose to his feet, raising his hand as he called upon his positivity staff.

"Whoa, whoa, easy there pal!" The inky creature spoke, hands held in front of him, placating. The skeleton tried their best to appear harmless, not wanting to start a conflict.

"Who are you? How… how did you get here?" Dream demanded shakily, not faltering his grasp on his weapon. The strange monster had a sash of various vials strapped to him, paint it seemed. A large, comically so, brush was also strapped to his back. Some sort of artist then?

“Oh shoot, right! Uh, hi! My name is Ink!” The skeleton greeted, the shapes in his eyes shifting like the fluid in a lava lamp. “You’re Dream, right?”

“How did you- “

“I know lots of things! Kind of my job as a protector, ya know?” Ink interjected quickly. He continued to grin brightly at the positive demi-god before him.

“Protector…” Dream echoed with a small frown on his face. He obviously had a lot of catching up to do.

Within the space between planes, both the multiverse and “the between” where the seven major guardians resided, lay the anti-void. Or what it was formally known as before Erratum had inhabited it.

When being guided by Karma, they had taught them how to manipulate the environment around them. It was a blank slate that was easily tampered with. It belonged to Erratum anyway, so they were free to do with it as they pleased. The best way to describe how they altered the environment is to look at the plane’s base materials. They saw it as an equivalent to a code in a computer, which displayed to them the fabric of the reality around them. Despite never having seen it previous to their first experience, it made sense to them. It was like a language that they’d been native to since the moment they were created.

And so, the plane shaped to what Erratum saw fit.

The god sat peacefully beneath a tree; eyes closed as they reached out through reality shifting. They had to ensure they had not screwed up too badly with the whole Dream situation. Fortunately, none of the guardians appeared alarmed by the information. If anything, Faith and Hope seemed excessively relieved to hear of this news. That was a relief at least.

“Yip!”

Erratum opened their eyes quickly, concentration broken by the sharp sound. Glancing down, they beheld a small, white dog standing before them. It just… stared, vacantly, at the god. Erratum was puzzled by the creature, wondering how it possibly could have gotten here. No one could enter or exit without their permission. This simply should not be possible. Yet here stood this dog, little paws tapping excitedly on the ground in place.

Erratum reached out to the dog, attempting to feel if it was tangible. It seemed to be, as they rested their palm fully on its head.

How strange.

The dog continued to stare at them a moment, allowing the touch as Erratum puzzled over the creature. As quickly as the peaceful interaction began, it ended. The dog turned its head to the side, latching its sharp little teeth into their hand. Erratum gave a cringe at the bite, pulling at their hand until the dog released it. The dog yipped excitedly again, bowing its front half in a playful stance. Erratum reached out to snatch the dog, but it quickly darted away. The little dog gave a bark, a vortex swirling before it as it did so before it disappeared through it.

Well, that was… annoying.

Erratum examined their hand, deeming it nothing more than a few puncture wounds. Putting the strange encounter on the backburner, they closed their eyes once more. As the darkness overtook them, a new sound filled their mind. It was like the gentle stir of the wind, faint whispers within their mind. They quickly opened their eyes again, scanning around for any other intruders in their land. There was no one, but the whispers continued.

Erratum was open-minded to many of the things that have happened to them, including being torn away from their original world. Strange voices in their head were close to where they drew the line.

Still, they attempted to decipher some of the whispers within their mind. Most seemed to blend together, unable to surface from the sea of voices. A few seemed to stick out though, and they sounded… wishful? It was hard to tell. They begged for things, asked for guidance, sought out answers. It was all extremely confusing to the god. Why were they suddenly hearing all of this? They had no answers to give people, no great wisdom to impart them with. Surely there was some other qualified deity who should receive these.

A great wail within their mind drew these panicked thoughts to a halt. It seemingly stabbed through their conscious, ringing in their ears despair. It pleaded for anyone, anyone at all to hear. It was desperate, the being despondent, and Erratum had no idea where they were. This multiverse was vast, and they had nothing to go on but a cry for help.

They turned in place, almost as if searching for the direction of the call. Surely if they could hear it, they could also find the source. They just had to be creative, think outside of the box. As they puzzled upon this and boy wasn't this a puzzling day, a thought occurred to them. They could warp through reality to places at their will so long as they knew where they were attempting to go. If they focused on the want to find this person, surely it could work the same way? It made sense to them, but there was only one way to find out.

Slowly, they raised their hand and allowed the golden threads to pull back reality like a curtain. At first, they were greeted with nothing but the black abyss of the between. They sharpened their focus, and soon, a world greeted them. Erratum stepped through the portal as the world materialized, closing it behind them as they looked around. A strange open hall greeted them, much like a cathedral as each step they took echoed around the area. They came to a stop as they noticed another at the end of this great hall, staring directly at them.

“Who are you? Where did you come from?” The being was another skeleton monster, on guard and obviously hostile.

Erratum frowned slightly as they divided reality once more in front of them to the source of this universe. They felt muted surprise to find themselves in the original universe The Seven had made, glancing back up at the skeleton. It all seemed to check out as they closed the window before them.

“What was that? How did you do that?” The skeleton, Sans as they knew, questioned them. Erratum continued to walk forward, silent and offering no explanation as they did. The other wouldn’t comprehend it even if they tried to explain.

“Stay over there,” Sans demanded, magic lashing out in hostility from where he stood. Erratum could feel the pulse of magic from where they stood, knowing the other was reacting purely on animalistic fear. They elected to remain where they stood, not wanting to engage with this monster. It was their guardians’ precious world after all.

“Good…good,” Sans muttered as the other came to a halt, never taking his eyes off of them. He scanned the being up and down, trying to understand what was going on. This had never happened before in all the resets he’d witnessed. Never had some tall, darker skeleton waltzed in from thin air and approached him. As much as he

welcomed a change of pace, he was also wary of it.

“Now… I’ll ask again. Who are you, and how did you get here?” He felt like he was in no place to make demands, but did it really matter anyway? If they killed him, he’d just come back the next reload. They’d already taken down the homicidal human four times before this… person appeared. He was due to slip up to the demonic child, so did it really matter if this skeleton killed him instead?

Erratum watched as the other struggled with his thoughts, the conflict clear on his face. They’d never interacted with the other universes before, and they weren’t sure how to start now. *Should* they start now? Wasn’t the entire issue with this multiverse the fact that interference had unbalanced it? If they were meant to help this multiverse, however, perhaps it wouldn’t hurt to try.

“**I heard you.**” Errarum's voice echoed and carried, almost ethereal as it reached the other. It was as good a place to start as anywhere.

“You *heard* me,” Sans echoed, voice dry and full of doubt. Erratum understood it was probably a hard concept to grasp and truly, it didn’t make much sense to them either. They didn’t speak much at all, let alone communicate with other people in this world, so they struggled to navigate through a conversation.

“**You were calling. Asking. You pleaded for assistance, for someone to hear.**” Erratum attempted again, hoping that would somehow explain everything. Watching the look on his face shift, they supposed it did in a way.

“You… heard? How could you possibly hear that? I didn’t even say anything, it was just…” Sans trailed off as he watched the skeleton approach him again, this time allowing them to get closer. The other gave him a quizzical stare at this, stopping in front of him as they

waited to hear their words.

"Just…a prayer," Sans finished as he looked up at the god. "I'm desperate, I thought… I never thought someone could actually hear them. I didn't believe anyone was out there to hear them." He explained, voice filled with both disbelief and awe. Erratum gave a small upturn of the mouth, resting their hand on the top of the other's skull fondly. They felt the other had more to say, so they remained comfortably silent as always. It took a few moments of quiet, but eventually the other started up again.

"I…I just want this to end." Sans breathed after a moment, seeming to be awash with anguish and resolve all at once. "Over and over again… there hasn't been anything but death and despair. We've all suffered so much for so long, not that anyone else is aware," He added with a hint of bitterness. "I'm not sure how long it's been… weeks? Months? Years? Of just… endless genocide. Reset after reset, kill and repeat. I'm… I'm so *tired* and… and I can't keep doing this. I can't keep going at this rate. I feel like I've been standing in this one spot for an eternity."

It was clear to Erratum that the pain ran deep with this monster. From what they gathered; this world seemed to be stuck in a loop. An endless loop of the fallen human slaying the inhabitants before skipping all the way back in time to do it again. This seemed uncharacteristic; the universe should have a balance between these loops. While Fate may have given the fallen humans in this multiverse such a power to redo things, it should still follow a pattern. If this world was cycling through the same experience over and over again, something was wrong.

"Is there anything you can do? Please, I'm begging you, pal, if… if there's *anything* at all you can do, I'll take it. I'll do anything." Sans pleaded with Erratum, gripping onto the front of their robes a moment. While the other only came up to roughly their false ribs, it was still enough to jostle the god forward a bit. Erratum reached down to manually unlatch the other from their robes before guiding their hands back down to their sides.

“**I can try.**”

Erratum had no idea what they were doing. They had come to investigate the mysterious voice, not directly mess with the reality of the original universe! Still, if there really was a problem, they were the best qualified to fix it. The Seven would want that, right? Surely, they could understand why they were doing this. They weren’t like the creator who endlessly played god by creating all these alternative worlds. Erratum knew they were only trying to justify themselves, but knew regardless of the morality of it, they were going to do it anyway.

Erratum reopened the window into the universe’s base components, hearing the audible inhale Sans gave. This universal “code” was much different from Erratum’s plane, which served to make things a bit more difficult. This wasn’t just a massive blank void, there were people here and timelines. There was no way they were going to directly influence the time without the original source. Fortunately, it seemed that wouldn’t be too much of a problem.

Sans took a defensive stand once more as soft footsteps echoed through the corridor. Erratum turned their head and set their sights on the small child at the end of the hall. Their sleeves were stained with dust and their hand clutched a knife tightly. This must be the child Fate blessed with the true reset ability.

Perfect.

“Hmm… that expression,” Sans spoke, hands stuffed in his pockets as he observed the child. “That’s the expression of someone who’s-“ He didn’t get to finish his usual spiel as Erratum raised their hand up and shot forth strings of gold. The strings seemed to pierce straight through the child’s chest without causing any direct physical wound, tightly wrapping around the culmination of their being. With a rough tug, the strings retracted with the vibrant soul in its web. The child

fell to the floor, limp and motionless as Erratum caught the soul in their open hand. Sans could only gawk silently, as it all seemed to happen so fast, he barely registered it.

"What did you just do??" He turned fearful eyes back on Erratum, who merely held onto the soul and gazed into the open void before them. They glanced back up at Sans before looking to the soul in consideration.

"**This universe bends to the will of this child. Their soul holds the power to bring time back to the beginning, and in order for me to do so as well, I need the same power**." Their eyes met Sans's, who seemed to grasp what they were saying. "**I may be unable to stop these… horrible events from taking place, but I can certainly try to rebalance this world.**" They didn't bother to explain further what they meant, pushing the soul forth to alter the universal code. They soon found themselves floating, greeted with an endless void a moment as they closed their rift

They equivalated this to doing a "hard reset" on the universe. Much like one would erase data on a hard drive before restoring it back to its factory settings. Any anomalies or loops brought forth from the abuse of time travel, hopefully, would correct itself this way. This was the first time Erratum ever attempted such drastic measures, so it truly could go either way. Either this would help regulate things, or they screwed up way worse than in Dreamtale. As the universe blipped back into existence though, they didn't feel any sort of instability that suggested a catastrophe. Erratum landed gracefully, ankle-deep in the cold snow. The door to the ruins was against their back as they glanced around.

Huh, this wasn't where they had originally entered the universe. Not thinking too much about it, the god trudged forward through the snowy wooded area. Past the gate that truly would stop not a soul, they came across a small clearing. There stood a little checkpoint stand and an oddly but conveniently shaped lamp. Sitting at the crude checkpoint was Sans, looking bewildered and ruffled. He glanced over at the sound of crunching snow, the glow of his eyes dilating as he

saw the other.

“So… that wasn’t a dream then… that was real,” Sans muttered as Erratum made their way to his checkpoint. “I don’t even understand what you did or… or how you did it.” He rambled a moment with how bizarre and unreal the situation was. Erratum let him, understanding that it was way beyond the comprehension of most monsters. “I dunno do I… do I pay you? Do you want something? I don’t have much to give you but…” He trailed off as the god once again placed their hand on the top of his head. Sans didn’t really understand what that meant but remained quiet regardless.

“**There is nothing in this universe you could offer me. You called for me, and I did what I could. I’ve interfered far more than I should have, so I must leave now.**” They pulled their hand back after a moment and divided the thin fabric of reality again to step through. As they crossed the threshold, however, Sans spoke up again.

“Hey!”

Erratum turned to face him through the still open window to his world. The skeleton walked around his checkpoint, giving the portal a fascinated yet intimidated look over. “Just… thank you.” He settled upon, unable to find any other words to say. Erratum gave that same faint smile, nodding their head once at them to show they understood. With that, the strings pulled the rip together like a thread pulling a rip in a shirt together with a needle. Sans could only stare at where the dark skeleton had simply vanished just as abruptly as they had appeared. He had expected to endlessly fight with the devil today, and somehow, he met a god instead.

Chapter End Notes

> I did not expect to write this today or write THIS MUCH for sure. I appreciate all the responses I've gotten to the prologue, and I hope this stuff doesn't come off as too... cringy, I suppose. Really I'm just here to write for fun this little multiverse that I've made in my brain. Thank you for reading!

Chapter 2: Check-ups and a gruesome tale

Chapter Summary

Erratum pokes back into the original universe again after speaking with the guardians. From there, they stumble upon a new world and with it, a disturbing realization.

Chapter Notes

A/N: I didn't expect to be posting chapters so soon, but I keep getting little ideas in between my daily life. While I don't have a perfect structure of how I'll get there, I do know how I want this whole thing to come to a conclusion, so trust me when I say that this will have an ending that (hopefully) makes sense.

For your reading consideration: The gods and guardians feel beyond gender to me. The usage of "they" and "them" is very much intentional to keep from forming a clear image or gender on them. It is meant to be to the viewer's imagination to decide if one is viewed as more feminine or masculine or neither. Build the world in your mind in whatever way you like.

The incident in the Undertale universe was met with mixed reviews from The Seven. Erratum had expected this, however, and had explained as much as they met with them through their reality shift. Karma, as expected, completely sided with their little protector and their decision to intervene. Time had condemned the other immediately, only letting up the slightest bit after a quick explanation of the seemingly fractured loop the world had been in.

"**In the end, it is up to my own judgment to deem what the acceptable measures to be taken are. I refrain from toying with these worlds for the sake of curiosity. I only followed the call for help.**" Erratum explained, floating within the abyss as The Seven, minus the currently missing Magic, surrounded them. "**I find myself suddenly plagued with voices of others within my mind. Sans had called them… what was it? Prayers, that was the word.**" They

felt a twinge of anxiety as the group of guardians exchanged looks with one another. It was difficult to make out any details of these beings, as they retained no real physical being. They were beings of power and magic, not inhabiting any sort of solid vessel.

"*That is preposterous. Why would the prayers of the multiverse reach you? Such ability should be accessible to us.*" Fate remarked with clear disdain. Erratum could not fault them; they had come to the same conclusion the moment they realized what was happening. They agreed they were much more capable of giving answers and wisdom.

"*If I may,*" Karma interrupted, their spectral form once more surrounding Erratum. They always found this comforting, like their entire body was floating in a deprivation tank. "*Erratum is just as well one of us, and they are connected to the physical plane that is the multiverse. It would make sense why these thoughts and prayers are only accessible to a deity within that plane. The distance and realities they must travel to reach us is an impossible journey, therefore they travel the shorter distance to Erratum.*" That… did make sense, in a convoluted way. This whole "god" thing was complex.

"*What does it matter if they come here or to them? The important thing is they are being heard!*" Faith interjected with audible delight in their words. "*Think of all the pleas and wishes that have gone unheard until now. I, for one, welcome this strange new development! Go forth and bring Faith back into the multiverse!*"

"*Yes! Their Hopes and dreams rest on you!*" Hope echoed.

Erratum had never felt more pressure than they did now in their entire life. These guardians, the most powerful beings in existence, weren't even able to help these universes! And they expected them to do it? It seemed like an impossible task.

"*You said it yourself; it is up to your own judgment to know when to answer these calls.*" Ah, they did say that. "*We will be watching you, to ensure your success.*" Karma assured them.

"*And to be sure you do not let the power go to your skull.*" Destiny quipped, their form turned toward Fate in what was most likely a spiteful look. Yes, truly there was no pressure in those words.

"*Go now, return to your body. We will be here when you need guidance.*" Karma assured as their comforting presence slowly faded.

It had been a while since the entire incident with the mysterious skeleton.

Two resets had gone by since then, one of pacifism, and one of a more neutral nature. All in all, it was a break Sans really needed after the endless loop of suffering. He had assumed he'd become apathetic after all the resets and times he had seen his friends die, but the countless loops seemed to reawaken that anguish again.

"Sans?"

Sans looked up; his musing broken as his brother stood before him. He did his best to give an easygoing grin, leaning back further into the couch as he did so. "Sup, bro?" He greeted casually. The other didn't seem to buy into his lackadaisical behaviour, jaws set into a frown.

"Do not 'sup' me, Sans! You have been lazing around even more than usual! As your cooler and more responsible brother, it is my duty to

make sure you are motivated to do your best!" Papyrus spoke with such certainty in his voice it briefly cheered the other up. "And, well, I am worried! You always have this look anymore. Like you're trying to solve an incredibly impossible puzzle made by yours truly! I thought, maybe, you'd want to talk about it?" He broached, hands wringing together anxiously as he did.

"Look, Pap, it's nothin'." Sans quickly assured, feeling a pang of guilt for causing the other distress. "My well of puns is just running a little dry. Been trying to come up with some new ones lately." He winked with a mischievous grin.

"Of all excuses, that is the flimsiest one you could have made." Sans cringed slightly at this. Yeah, it was a pretty shotty excuse; he was an overflowing pool of bad jokes. "I know you're a more… private monster, but I just want to help you! I know you don't seem to trust me, but-"

"That's not it at all!" Sans quickly interjected, sitting up straighter. "Of course I trust you! I just… I don't know if you'd even *believe me* if I told you." He admitted with a hesitant glance away from the other's face.

The other did not seem deterred by this. "Sans, if it is bothering you this much, it must be very real! Of course I would believe you!" Papyrus insisted, attempting once more to breach his secretive brother's defensive walls. Sans gave a long exhale, debating upon what to tell the other. What could he possibly say to explain what had been going on? Papyrus didn't remember the resets, didn't know the kind of struggle he had been going through, didn't know about the mysterious monster that interrupted the natural flow of how things usually went.

"I think I met god."

Whatever Papyrus had been expecting the other to say, that didn't appear to be it. "Erm… you met god? Am I hearing you correctly, brother?" He checked, unable to help but appear skeptical at the claim.

"Yeah, I didn't really think you'd-"

"No, no! I said I would take you seriously, and I am!" Papyrus quickly assured, waving his hands in front of him frantically to cut him off. "I just… you have to understand how surprising that is! It isn't every day that your brother meets god! Wowie…" He hummed as he dropped onto the couch beside him with a quizzical expression. "So, you mean you actually… saw them? The Angel?"

The Angel?

Ah, right. From the prophecies. It was common for the monsters to turn to this supposed "Angel" for guidance and prayer. Was that who that was? He didn't bother to ask at the time. "I'm not sure…"

"How did you come to meet?"

That was a harder question to answer. What did he say to *that?* 'Oh I was having a meltdown in the judgment hall after seeing a human that hasn't even come here in this timeline yet kill all my loved ones so I prayed to anyone that would listen to help me?' Yeah, that would go over well. Sans supposed the other wouldn't remember this conversation, however, come the next reset.

"I just… I was down, really felt lost, so I prayed for guidance. I didn't think that anyone would actually hear me, but I guess I was wrong." That seemed like a more believable answer, and it wasn't entirely untrue. "Yeah, they kinda just… appeared in front of me. Honestly? I

almost just attacked them at first." He grinned sheepishly. He huffed out a small laugh as Papyrus aggressively crushed him in a hug.

"I am so sorry you were having such a hard time Sans! I wish you would have told me you were feeling sad!" Papyrus mourned as he squeezed onto the other. "But! I am also very happy that there was someone out there that was able to help you! I should say thank you. Erm… though I suppose that would be a difficult thing to do." He frowned as he released the other. He seemed to come across an idea though, hitting the bottom of his fist into his gloved hand in a realization. "Of course! I simply have to send them a prayer myself! Expressing my gratitude for their assistance!"

Sans gave a small snicker as the other enthusiastically clasped his hands together and began to simply speak to the room around him. He didn't bother telling him that it really wasn't necessary to speak out loud; he could appreciate his enthusiasm.

"-And I am grateful that you took time out of your surely busy schedule to help my brother! I pray that he will continue to be happy and successful like his cool brother!" Well, that was certainly sweet.

"And maybe that you can inspire him to be cleaner and less lazy!" Ah, less sweet.

"**There isn't much I can do about choices of free will.**"

Both skeletal brothers jolted in surprise, nearly knocking heads as they frantically looked around. There, in a strange split in the wall, stood the strange skeleton from before. Well, they were more leaning out of the hole in the wall with their hands resting over the bottom of the split.

“Wowie! I can’t believe god is a skeleton!” Papyrus exclaimed, to which said god cringed.

“**Erratum.**”

“What?” Sans spoke as he looked at the now not-so-unfamiliar god.

“**Please, just call me Erratum.**” Erratum sighed at the dramatic title and reverence. “**That is my name, after all.**”

“Not a very godly name. No offense! Just… you know, being called the equivalent of an error?” Sans quickly attempted to explain his thoughts, though the other didn’t seem offended.

Erratum tilted their head a bit at the question, never having bothered to explore the meaning of their name. “**Considering the nature of corrections I have made so far in universes, I choose to see it as a call to action.**”

Well, that was certainly one way to view it, Sans supposed.

“Sure, uh, Erratum. Not that I’m not grateful for ya but, why are you here?” Sans questioned, a little nervous their appearance meant there were more problems in their world.

“**Your brother is very loud.**” Ah, right. Papyrus was naturally a very loud monster, and it wasn’t exactly surprising that it transferred from prayer to Erratum. “**I needed to check in any way to see if all issues have been resolved here.**” They assured, seeming to sense the twinge of embarrassed guilt from the other.

“Everything seems to be back to normal. No issues or anything now.” Sans assured, trying to be discrete for the sake of his brother. “Just… thanks again for that. It really does mean a lot.” He added on quietly with a more genuine smile to his face. Erratum fully stepped through the split in the wall, allowing it to close behind them as they did so. They approached both skeletons, leaving Sans to marvel at the fact they were taller than even his brother. Once again, they rested their hand on the top of Sans’s head.

“**I was glad to do it. This world is to be protected by all means necessary, and that is what I intend to do.**” That was both relieving and a little worrying to hear. What kind of other threats were out there that endangered this world? Sans hoped this person, Erratum, could truly ward off any problems that may arise like they claimed.

“So… does that mean there are other worlds out there? Like… alternate realities?” Sans took this opportunity to ask some actual nagging questions that only a higher being could answer.

“**The simple answer is yes. There are many alternative universes that exist within this multiverse.**” Erratum explained. The other stated it so calmly while Sans was virtually losing his mind at the prospect. They answered a question Sans had been researching his *entire life* to know. Though he supposed it wasn’t a big deal for someone like Erratum who could simply walk between realities with ease. “**I’m actually rather surprised that I was the first to visit your world.**”

“What does *that* mean?” Sans spoke anxiously. Were there more beings out there like Erratum? Were they all as friendly? He had a sneaking suspicion that they weren’t; that would make his life too easy.

Erratum winced a bit at this, mentally berating themselves for even mentioning it. They had been certain the creator would have been curious enough to poke around in a universe they didn’t create. Then

again, maybe they did and simply kept at a distance like they had in Dreamtale. “**It doesn’t matter. What matters is everything here is stable.**” They diverted, though they sensed the other had several follow-up questions to this. Thankfully, or more inconveniently perhaps, a loud crashing noise interrupted their exchange.

“It’s that blasted canine!” Papyrus shouted as the small, white dog scampered from the kitchen with a bone in its jaws. “And it’s got one of my bone attacks!” The dog dropped the bone as Erratum swiped for it, seeming to surprise the two brothers at the break in their calm demeanor. “**Hold still!**"

The dog managed to squeeze away, barking as another vortex swirled before it. “**Oh no you don’t!**” Erratum snarled as they managed to leap in after the annoying mutt before the vortex blipped from existence. Sans was left standing in the middle of his living room, confused and unsettled. He was left with more questions than answers as well as a newfound discomfort with the familiar white dog.

“Well!” Papyrus grinned as he bent down and retrieved the bone from the ground. “They seemed like quite a nice fellow!”

Erratum found themselves face down in the snow, significantly less graceful than their normal landings. Traveling via dog vortex was definitely not their choice of transportation.

They pulled themselves from the snow, brushing themselves off thoroughly while glancing around the environment. The atmosphere was… off. There was just a *feeling* in the air that they could sense. They reached within the universe’s components to get a sense of where they had landed. “**Horrortale… a name that certainly gives no eerie vibes.**” Erratum muttered sarcastically as they glanced around.

This time, they needed to be stealthy.

Using their golden strings, they hoisted themselves up into the tall pines of the forest. It wasn't exactly pleasant with all the pine needles pricking at their clothing and bones, but they'd live. They carefully moved tree-to-tree, surveying the land below. There didn't seem to be many signs of life, but the landscape seemed to match most of what the original universe's structure was. Perhaps the name was merely deceiving.

That was until they came across a disturbing sight.

They had paused when they saw a monster, a Snowdrake by the looks of it, crouched in the snow. Erratum settled themselves on a branch, watching with curiosity as the creature flailed around a moment in a frenzy of shrill screeches and feathers. It appeared like it was struggling with something. Further intrigued, Erratum jumped to the next tree for a better vantage point. They immediately regrated that decision.

Below them, the Snowdrake was viciously pecking and tearing at a fallen Jerry. Erratum had felt immediate nausea at the scene, gripping onto the branch tighter to ground themselves. Sure, no one liked Jerry, but this was gruesome! What kind of place was this anyway? What world had this multiverse's creator made?

Before they could even think to intervene, an axe soared through the air and perfectly bisected the Snowdrake from beak to tail. Erratum watched with muted horror as it fell to dust, the mutilated Jerry left twitching in the snow. A larger figure lumbered closer to the fallen monster, bony hand wrapping around the handle of the axe. Erratum deduced this was the universe's Sans, though he looked worse for wear. The skull plate was caved in at one side and they could see a singular glowing red light illuminating their left socket. The battered

skeleton lifted the axe over his shoulder, his opposite hand pulling at the bottom of his empty socket with a cruel grin. Erratum quickly opened a doorway back to their plane and fell in before they could witness anymore.

Erratum gulped down desperate breaths, head pounding and vision swimming as they processed everything. At least the name of the world made perfect sense now. There laid the question, however. *Why* did that universe exist? Why was it created? For what purpose? The creator intentionally formed and developed this world, they realized with a disturbing realization. This is what the creator wanted the world to be like. They had envisioned a dystopian reality where the monsters were these… well, *monsters.* They recalled Karma explaining the creator's rampant creation of universes both positive and negative, but they never suspected something like this!

With an even deeper sinking feeling in their hypothetical gut, they mused upon a more disturbing question.

Just how many more universes like this one were out there?

Chapter 3: Little light

Chapter Summary

> After years of small gestures and observations, Erratum answers another pleading call from a familiar voice.

Chapter Notes

> I had typed out half of this chapter before my computer decided to bite the dust. Finally got a new one in so I could complete it. Not sure how I feel about this chapter, but I think the next one will be a fun experiment to write. You'll see what I mean by the end.

Time seemed to pass rapidly after Erratum's first interactions with the multiverse. Year after year, they managed to somehow discover countless worlds of varying fates. Some were unique, some were near carbon copies of others. Some were light and cheery, and some were not. Time after time, world after world, it never became any easier to witness. Horrortale, Dusttale, Underfell, Underworld… seemed like they never ended. Erratum had lost count of the number of times they returned home to their plane and wept. Such *anguish* that existed in this multiverse settled heavily in their soul and caused it to pulse with shared suffering. The tears became so frequent that they seemed to carve twin golden paths in the corners of their sockets. They continued to struggle to understand why the creator would have done all of this. Was it sadistic delight? Curiosity? Just because he could? Erratum struggled to keep the bitterness from their soul at the very idea of the other treating the universes like playthings.

But then they were struck with another idea.

Ink had been created without a soul, and thus without any true emotions. Karma had given Erratum an in-depth explanation of the

creator and his formation, so they felt comfortable enough to draw a conclusion. Perhaps he was doing it to understand emotions better. Sure, he could simply use paint to replicate the emotion of sadness or anger, but what did that truly mean to him? They were emotions with no ties to an external or even internal trigger. Even experiencing it, perhaps the other didn't really understand emotion. Creating universes with heavy themes of sadness, hate, joy, fear… maybe it was all a way to express these emotions. A way to study them and understand how they connected people to events or their environment. It was a less grim theory than the others.

Erratum had been slowly inserting themselves more and more into other universes. They took better care to keep out of the way, however, and remain mostly a mild task manager at best. Little things to help, mostly out of sight. A comforting word in the form of a passing echo flower message, conveniently placed items, and whatnot. They still had no great wisdom to impart to others, so they mostly left those wishes unattended. There wasn't much they could do to assure a person about their place in the world or the meaning of life. That was *way* too complicated to even consider dealing with. There were times they had intervened in more major ways, mainly if the universe was showing signs of instability. These problems required a more hands-on approach, whether it be manipulating the universal "code" itself or eliminating errors by force. They were certain that more than once they'd been spotted, but they did their best to be discreet.

The voices had become easier to live with, and thus, easier to navigate through. The whispers always remained as soft lapping at the inside of their mind, always ready to be pulled forth for more consideration. They told Erratum of their sorrow, their hopes, their joy, their rage. They felt as though each person was someone they had known their entire life through the constant chatter. There were certain voices that returned daily or even more than once a day to them. Those beings Erratum had given little names to in order to distinguish them from the sea of voices. Each held a significance to the makeups of their words and energy that was always radiating from them. From the soft mutters of the Lonely heart to the impossible wants and expectations of the Dreamer. Each one brought a sense of fondness to Erratum, to the point where they could identify a change in their patterns almost instantly.

That was how they were able to pick up a problem with their Little light.

Little light was always so bright and exuberant with their every prayer and wish. They were never for themselves, either, but for those around them. Little light always asked for others' safety, not their own, for the happiness of others, not for themselves. Lately, however, the vibrant light seemed to dim with each whisper it gave. There was no great regaling of their day and their great aspirations and hopes for others. There were only pleas for comfort. They asked to understand, which was confusing. Erratum didn't know what they wanted to understand. They asked for strength, which Erratum could not supply to them. It was frustrating to have the knowledge of all these wants of others with limited power to do anything about them. A call for help, however, was something Erratum was always able to answer.

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He was never really sure how to start these out. What was the proper way to address a deity anyway? Was there a right or wrong way to do this?

"I want to start off by saying, again, that I am very happy where I am! Things could always be better, sure, but I have a lot here! I have a roof over my head, a job I enjoy, my friends… my brother," He frowned as he hesitated a moment. "I don't know what's going on with him. He's changed so much, and not in the good ways! He's reclusive, he's obviously saddened by something. He always has this haunted look in his eyes… and I can't help him. He won't *let* me, because he won't let me in. Maybe I need to be a better brother? Can you help me be the brother he needs?" He practically begged as he clenched his hands tighter together. "I don't ask for much, and I'd hate to start now, but… I just… I want to make him happy again…"

"**Little light,**"

The skeleton startled a bit, head shooting up at the sound of an unfamiliar voice. There, settled cross-legged in the middle of his bed, was an unfamiliar skeleton with blackened bones. He lowered his hands to his sides limply, simply trying to process this new development. "W-who are you? How… how did you get in my room?" He whispered, as if afraid to provoke the other. The other frowned, tilting their head slightly at the question as they made no move for him. Looking over this new monster, he could tell that the other radiated a strange calmness and power that seemed otherworldly. "Are you an angel?" At the confused frown, the smaller skeleton gave a thoughtful hum. "No, you don't have the big feathery wings like the books say." He deduced, to which Erratum glanced over their shoulders a moment as if to envision them. As they looked back, the skeleton still kneeled on the floor traced the golden lines of mana with his eyes before landing on the marking engraved on their forehead.

"…Are you a god?" He breathed out in wonder, staring up at them hopefully. Erratum gave a soft smile at this and moved to settle their hand atop his head. The smaller skeleton could only sit frozen in place under the monster's hand. "Are… are you here to help me?" He

continued with growing hope in his soul.

"**I can certainly try, Little light.**" Erratum offered truthfully in response.

The skeleton squinted a bit as he finally stood from the floor. "Why are you calling me that? Not that I'm bothered by it or anything!" He quickly reassured with a nervous tug at his handkerchief, to which Erratum just gave a fond smile. "I'm just curious? I guess?"

Erratum could understand his confusion but even now, they still had no name to go off on. "**It is the name I gave your words. The voice of your prayers.**" They explained, hoping that somehow made sense. "**I do not know every person's name in this multiverse. That would be a lot to keep track of.**"

"Oh! Of course, where are my manners?" The skeleton gasped as he realized he hadn't even introduced himself. What kind of host was he to not introduce himself to his guest?? "I'm Sans!" He beamed brightly.

Erratum gave another frown at this, having already deduced that. "**Yes, well,**" They sighed as they stood.

"Wowzer…" Sans muttered as they stood fully before him.

"**There are many named Sans in this multiverse. I can't call all of you by that.**"

"Oh! Of course, duh! For distinguishing between realities, I go by Blue!" Blue quickly amended with a confident thumbs up.

Interesting, so this Sans was aware and potentially interacting with other realities? Seems like something the creator must be involved in. They weren't here to probe into Blue's knowledge of the creator, however. "**You say you want to be a better brother.**" They refocused, but paused as Blue gasped and got to his feet.

"Wait! I-I wasn't prepared for someone to answer me tonight, I don't have an offering!" He frantically began flitting about the room in search of something. Erratum seemed confused by this as they had never been revered so heavily.

"**That is unnecessary. I do not require compensation for-**"

"No, no, no! It isn't payment for that, it's an *offering.* You're my god, offerings are important, especially when they answer you!" Blue insisted vehemently at the other's dismissal of the act. Blue quickly threw his door open, taking the stairs two at a time to reach the living room. Erratum followed at a much slower pace as they observed the strange behaviour the other exhibited.

"I know I have-! AHA!" Blue grinned triumphantly as he pressed down onto the couch cushion and heard a small clinking sound. He quickly dug through the couch before pulling out several golden coins he had rescued from its clutches. He quickly darted back over to Erratum, holding his hands out with a satisfied expression on his face.

Erratum had absolutely no use for gold. They didn't use currency, didn't buy anything, they didn't even eat most of the time. They were a monster of very little maintenance, so gold would be better suited to someone else. They chose not to voice this, however, as they could clearly see this was a ritual that the skeleton found great importance in. They moved their hand to collect the coins from him, tucking them away securely within their robe. "**Thank you, Little light. Your kindness and generosity know no bounds.**" The smaller monster

seemed quite satisfied with this.

"Mweh, it's the right thing to do! Um…" Blue frowned a moment as he looked the god up and down a moment. "What… what exactly do I call you? Sorry I didn't even ask before!" He realized with mortification.

"**Erratum.**"

"Erratum? Hmm… not what I was expecting. Oh!" Blue grinned as he came upon an idea. "What if I call you Errata? Same thing, but it sounds way more godlike!"

Errata? It was true, it was basically the same thing. It was simply the plural of erratum, and this was the second time someone had commented on their "not-so-godly" name. Picking a name wasn't easy when you have nothing to go off! "**I suppose that is fine.**" They conceded after a moment of consideration. Blue beamed brightly at this and nodded once in agreement.

"**Now, tell me more about what troubles you.**"

Blue deflated a small bit as they flopped back on the sofa and hung their head. "As you probably already know, Papyrus is my only family. The only one I know of, at least, or remember. We were always really close and, and we never hid things from each other! Recently, though… well, maybe not *too* recently, it's been more of a gradual process, he's been changing. I don't know what it is but… he's pulled away from me. He makes fewer jokes and doesn't spend much time at home anymore. I don't think he knows I'm aware, but he has nightmares. *Loud* nightmares. He screams and thrashes, sometimes his magic goes crazy." He picked at the threading of the cushion under him, looking troubled. "I want him to be able to come to me and confide in me! I may not look like it, but I'm the big brother! I'm

supposed to be there for him like I was when we were younger!" He finally stopped to take a breath after pouring his soul out. "So… I want to be the brother he needs right now."

Erratum pitied the young monster as they knew *exactly* what was wrong with his brother. "**Are you aware of what a reset is?**" They posed the question rather than reassuring the upset monster. Blue blinked as he looked back up at Erratum curiously.

"Well, yeah. When I first started communicating with other universes and formed the Star Sans, a lot of different versions of me explained them. I don't remember any myself, but I'm aware that it happens in my world too. It's… kind of scary, knowing you've probably already lived this day before and are destined to do the same thing again." Blue admitted with a slight shudder.

"**It would be difficult, then, to be able to remember all of it and have no control. To be unable to stop it.**"

"That's what the others say."

"**So you must understand how your brother feels, in a sense,**"

Blue seemed to freeze at this statement. How Papyrus feels? That didn't make any sense; all the people who remembered resets were Sanses! "Papyrus wouldn't remember any of those things, he's not a Sans!" He voiced. Erratum didn't seem put off by this, and that brought anxiety to Blue's soul.

"**You are familiar with the original multiverse's Sans, correct?**"

A nod.

"**All alternate realities stem from his universe, and thus there are many different iterations of his being. Sans is lazy, he tells lame jokes, he consumes excessive amounts of condiments, and he has an energetic brother. What does that sound like to you?**" Erratum posed, standing quietly as they let the other mull this over.

Blue looked down at the floor, eyelights darting about as if searching for the answer to this. What did it sound like? In what way? Lazy, bad jokes, condiments, ugh. It sounded *way* too much-

Blue looked back at Erratum instantly at that thought. His face reflected the heartbreak in his soul, which in turn caused a pulse of agony within Erratum. "It… it sounds like *my* brother…" He breathed with horror. "He… he remembers everything. No one else remembers but him… oh stars. *Stars*…! Poor Papy!" He gasped as he rested his hand over his mouth. Erratum could do nothing but rest their hand on the weeping monster's skull, allowing him to take it all in.

"Errata," Blue muttered weakly after he pulled himself together somewhat. "You… you have to help us, please. I can't see him like this anymore, I don't want him to suffer." He grasped tightly at the sleeve of the god's robe, holding it like a lifeline. "Is there anyway… is there any way you could take those memories? Keep him from remembering all of this?" He questioned with obvious hesitation. Erratum was visibly startled at the request as they had not expected it. The memories of the resets were given by their Protector, Karma. They supposed if anyone could, it would probably be Erratum.

"**In theory,**" Erratum began, holding up their free hand at Blue's expression to keep him from interrupting. "**However, there is a reason all judges remember these timelines. Karma has given them the job of dealing out proper judgment in their worlds, and remembering what the human tries to erase is part of what helps them judge.**" Blue looked disappointed by this, clenching harder onto

the sleeve.

"So there has to be someone to remember." He understood, really he did, but it just didn't seem fair that his brother got the short end of the stick. Papyrus would do anything for Sans, even through all the suffering. "Then," Blue spoke again, a new thought entering his mind. "Can you make it me instead?" Erratum was, once again, thrown for a loop at this request. "I know what that means, the implications of that. Having to remember everything."

"**I'm not certain that you do,**" Erratum replied as they looked toward the staircase. They could sense the soul above them rousing into an alert state. "**I also don't think your brother would be very pleased with that idea. Taking his memories without consent and burdening yourself instead. Even good intentions can have poor taste.**"

"Why do you have to be so wise?"

"**When you've been alive as long as I have and dwelled with beings far beyond comprehension, you learn a few things.**" Blue pouted further at the equally eloquent answer. He was determined to make this work somehow, he just had to keep thinking. This line of thought seemed the most promising so far, he just needed to dig a little deeper. Then, it hit him. The most obvious of answers.

"You *can* make me remember then? Could you do that? So, we both remember the resets?" Blue questioned, to which Erratum gave a small smile. Their Little light truly had a heart that exceeded him.

"Absolutely not."

Erratum glanced back at the staircase again, nodding in casual

greeting to the lanky skeleton quickly descending the stairs. They quickly sidestepped as Papyrus rapidly approached with a less than pleased expression. “Papy, stop! Errata is a very special guest! Don’t provoke them!” Blue pleaded as the younger brother scowled at the god.

“Special guest,” Papyrus scoffed as he sized up the taller god. “More like a special pain in my ass. You think you can just put these ridiculous ideas into my brother's head?” He demanded as he jabbed his finger against Erratum’s chest.

“Watch your language! You’re embarrassing me in front of my god!” Blue cried out with mortification as he pulled at his brother’s hoodie.

Erratum quietly stared down the enraged brother with a neutral expression. They moved their hand very slowly to the wrist connected to the hand jabbing them and snatched it. “**Do not, if you value that hand. Just as you wouldn’t want to be touched without consent, neither do I.**” They spoke in an even voice as they redirected the hand back to the skeleton’s side. They took that time to back up a significant amount to keep a safe distance from the two.

“Don’t feed this creep’s weird god-complex! They’re probably just trying to prey on you!” Papyrus spoke in exasperation. “They could have killed you, Sans! They’re spouting nonsense about resets and making you remember, which is *bullshit*, might I add.”

“This wouldn’t even be an issue if you had just *talked* to me!” Blue shouted back with rising frustration. “I try so hard to be there for you, but you treat me like I’m some child! I am the older sibling, darn it, and I know a lot more than you seem to think I do! I’m not oblivious and I’ve seen way more realities than you have. So for once in your life can you stop being so *resistant and let me in!*”

The silence that followed was uncomfortable, even for Erratum. Papyrus refused to meet Blue's eyes as he shoved his hands in his hoodie pockets. "You wouldn't get it… you couldn't understand." He muttered.

"But that's why I want to do this! So I *can* understand! So you have someone who you can relate to, who you can confide in! You can't do this alone, not anymore. I will not allow it!" Blue responded firmly to this dejection. "There is absolutely nothing in this world or any other world that can make me change my mind!" He declared. Papyrus gave a weak chuckle at this and leaned against the arm of the couch.

"Yeah… I know. You were always like that."

Blue's tense posture relaxed a bit, seeing the other wasn't going to continue fighting with him. "I know, and I'm sorry that you don't like this, but I don't like that you have to do this either! So we're just going to have to do this together!" He flopped down beside his brother and crossed his arms firmly. "Together!" He emphasized once more.

"Together…" Papyrus relented with a heavy sigh. "So," He glanced up at Erratum who still stood quietly at a distance. "Can you really do all that you say you can?" He questioned, ignoring the hard elbow to the ribs from his brother.

"**I haven't had the time to even agree to this. But yes, I believe I can.**" Erratum spoke as they divided reality with their strings. Blue watched with pure fascination while Papyrus just stared in disbelief at the act. "**This should be a fairly simple process, but I have to warn you. If you do this, I am uncertain if I will be able to undo it.**" They advised with a glance to the duo. Seeing the determination still etched onto Blue's face, Erratum smiled and looked back to the "code" of this world. "**I understand. If you could both, please come closer.**" They insisted, to which the two rose from the couch and approached. "**This is an odd request, but I require your soul.**" They spoke as they met Papyrus's eyes.

“Yeaaaah, I really don’t know about that.”

“**I understand your hesitation, but the gift Karma gave the judges is in you, and I need that in order to replicate it.**” Erratum explained with their hand raised. “**May I? It will not hurt.**”

Probably.

Papyrus seemed extremely uneasy, glancing down at Blue who gave him an enthusiastic thumbs up in encouragement. “Be easy, kay? I’d like to get it back in one piece.” He half-joked. Erratum nodded as golden threads wisped from their hands and seemed to pierce straight through the skeleton’s sternum. Papyrus froze at the sensation. It wasn’t a painful one, but it sure made him uneasy to see it. As the threads wrapped around his soul, he was stricken with a feeling of warmth. It was like his being had been wrapped in a towel fresh out of the dryer, warm and comforting.

Erratum withdrew the soul from the other and allowed it to hover close, still encased in their strings. They remained vigilant and hyperaware of every move they made with the fragile source, small beads of sweat on the sides of their skull. “**Just need to plug this into here…**” They muttered as the strings around the soul extended further and sunk into the open rift. “**Perfect. Now let’s see if I can…**” They muttered, closing their eyes and attempting to focus on finding the familiar aura. After a few moments, they could sense the familiar magic of Karma. “**There you are,**” They muttered as they shot another set of strings from their other hand to Blue. The skeleton squeaked as his soul was also retrieved.

“Not to be ungrateful, but maybe a little warning next time!” Blue requested as he watched his own soul float away. Even as unsettling as it was, Blue couldn’t help but admit it was a nice feeling, like a big hug to the core of his being. He knew he was safe there.

“**Sorry, I should have said something.**” Erratum agreed with a small wince of sympathy. They turned back to the open rift as the strings from Blue’s soul snaked into it as well. They glanced up one last time, searching their faces for any hesitation. Well, from Blue at least. The other still stood firm, so they returned to their task. They simply needed to thread a single string between their souls to finish the transfer of information. It was set up much like completing a circuit, which in a way Erratum supposed it was. “**You may feel a slight tingling sensation in your atoms.**” They remarked before running a length of thread between the souls and completing the circuit from rift to both souls.

A tingle didn’t even begin to describe it.

Blue felt as though his entire chest would cave in from the heaviness. It was like ten blue attacks pushing down on his soul all at once. Papyrus seemed mostly unaffected but alarmed at his brother’s distress. It made sense; Erratum wasn’t actively changing the makeup of *his* being. It only lasted a handful of seconds, but it felt like an hour before it ceased. Blue gasped out for air as his soul returned to his chest, sinking down onto his knees. Papyrus quickly crouched beside him to fuss and check him over. “I’m fine, I’m fine…” Blue assured as he batted the other’s hands away.

“**I’ve never done that before, so my apologies if it was uncomfortable.**”

“*You’ve never done it before?!*” Papyrus squawked with indignation. “So, you decided we’d be your test trial??” To which Erratum tilted their head.

“**No one has ever asked for such a complex thing. I asked several times if you wished to back out.**”

“Yeah, but you never mentioned you’d *never done this before!*” Papyrus reemphasized with distress.

“It doesn’t matter! We’re fine! I’m fine!” Blue reminded him as he got back to his feet. “So… did it work?” He questioned excitedly. Erratum just nodded in response, to which Blue grinned and moved to hug his brother. “Good! Now you don’t have to keep doing this alone! Next time it happens, we can be together, and I can help you!” He promised him.

“Heh… not sure I’ll really want to talk about it, but I appreciate the gesture. It would be nice just to have someone there that gets it…” Papyrus sighed as he rubbed the top of Blue’s skull. “Guess that’s that then.”

Erratum smiled to themself as they closed the rift back up again. While they weren’t exactly sure how this would affect this reality, they were certain it wouldn’t cause massive disruption. Their Little light was happy, and really that was all they cared about.

Their musings were interrupted by a piercing series of shrieks in their mind. So intense, it momentarily knocked them to the ground.

“Errata!” Blue cried as he rushed to their side and knelt beside them. “Are you okay? Did the process hurt you?” Erratum shook their head as a hand came to press tightly to their forehead.

These were screams of fear, of pain. Prayers of desperation that were snuffed out mid-thought by some force. They fought to shove them down in order to get a better grasp on what was happening through all the chaos and noise. This was beyond the normal prayers for safety from a genocidal human.

“**I have to go. Someone needs me.**”

“I understand, you’re a very busy god! Thank you for all that you’ve done.” Blue helped the other to their feet before stepping back. “I hope to see you again sometime soon!” He called as Erratum disappeared quickly through another rift. He jolted as his phone vibrated soon after, frowning as he moved to answer it.

“Hello? Ink?”

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insatiable desire for EXP and power. There was absolutely no way he could take down this guy, but he wasn't sure if he could hold out until the Star Sans group got here. He was out of places to go as he stood mere feet away from a sharp cliff that plunged into the abyss below.

"Shit," He swore as he whipped around to face the bloodthirsty (dust-thirsty?) grin of his assailant.

"Cornered already? Too bad, I was enjoying the hunt. It's more fun when they run." Dust grinned viciously at the fear in his face. "That's okay, I'll make this quick for ya. Sans to Sans, ya know? I'm doing you a favour." He chuckled darkly as he gripped tightly onto a sharpened bone. Before he could even think to step closer, however, he was met with a sudden tear between them. This looked nothing like his boss's portals, and it definitely wasn't any of the pathetic Stars, so who could it be?

Their interest peaked even further as a tall, blackened-boned skeleton stepped through the tear before it knitted back together. Now *this* looked like a piece of prey he could find satisfaction in killing. "Come to join the fun?"

Erratum sharpened their glare as they focused on the offender. "**You do not belong to this world.**" They never took their eyes off of him in the chances that he lunged. "**Leave, or I will remove you myself.**"

"Oooh, is that a threat? I don't think you know what you're up against." Dust snickered as more jagged bones materialized around him, eye burning with magic. Erratum withdrew their arms from their robe and moved them in an intricate pattern. A rope wrapped tightly around one arm, a shining silver weight attached to the other end. The rope dart sat perfectly poised against their arm, like a cobra ready to strike.

“**I don’t think you do either,**”

And just like that, it was on.

Chapter 4: How (not) to fight a god

Chapter Summary

> Armed and ready to drive off the murder-happy skeleton from Outertale, Errartum breaks their oath of interfering minimally in the multiverse.

Chapter Notes

> A/N: This took longer than it should have, but nursing school decided 3 exams every other week was acceptable. Anyhow, enjoy the obvious "Dev has never written a fight scene" content. I also appreciate those who have read and commented because it does mean a lot. I am solely motivated by it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Erratum wasn't foolish enough to make the first move. They remained perfectly posed in waiting, knowing the other's frenzied bloodlust wouldn't allow them to stay still for long. Just as they predicted, the other took the bait and launched himself forward with a wicked grin. Erratum quickly swung the rope in a circle, gaining up momentum until they were able to launch it forward with the force of a striking serpent. Dust was forced to lurch himself to the side, snarling a bit at the attempt. Erratum didn't hesitate to swiftly pull back on the rope at an angle, catching the other by the scapula as it retracted back to the god. Dust was knocked off-center and briefly fell to his knees at the dull ache of the blunt metal colliding with and then scraping across the bone. Erratum stepped back and turned their body as the heavy metal dart returned, moving fluidly to arch the weapon around again to prevent it from colliding into their own body.

"Fancy tricks you got," Dust growled as he was quickly back up on his feet and armed again. "Fine, we don't gotta do close combat. I hope you can make peace with whatever god you have." He grinned as rows of sharp bones circled around him. "Cause I'm gonna send you straight to 'em, express shipping."

Erratum was unmoved by this threat as they watched the spiral of magic coiling around the hostile monster. **"I have already made peace with myself centuries ago."** They replied, minimally engaging in the banter the other seemed to want. This seemed to successfully provoke the monster as he snarled once more and sent a flurry of attacks with a swipe of his hand. Erratum was quick to dodge the oncoming wave, securing the rope dart around their arm so they could freely use their hands. Their hand came up to their face, covering one eye and dragging it down. They pulled their hand away, golden threads of magic following and twinning around their fingers. They quickly threw their hand out and sent the strings forward to attempt to ensnare their assailant.

Dust quickly jumped out of the way of the strings, but in doing so lost concentration of his magic. The sharp projectiles came to a halt as he focused on the strange threads of magic. The strings didn't seem to dissipate or fall limp, however, as they still seemed to flow and pulsate in mid-air. The strings seemed to turn abruptly, catching the aggressive monster by the arm, and tightening their hold. Dust gave an enraged shout as he gripped the sharpened bone in his hand and brought it forward to slice the threads away. The magic barely even budged, refusing to be cut away. "What is this?!" He demanded as he yanked and thrashed his arm like an animal with its leg caught in a snare.

Erratum didn't bother with a reply as they pulled them forward with their strings. Dust hissed as he was dragged across the rocky ground, heels digging into the rocks to resist. Erratum easily overcame the resistance as they pulled the monster up, more strings wrapping around his middle as he hung midair. With the same fierceness as they threw their dart, they threw their entire body into the swing of their arm. Obeying the command, the strings harshly swung down and slammed Dust into the terrain below. He gave an audible pained shout as his spine met the ground, momentarily writhing. He grasped around a moment and attempted to get his magic to comply after the shock dissipated. He finally gripped onto a newly formed bone, quickly sending it careening toward his captor. Erratum was forced to release him to dodge, allowing Dust to scramble to his feet and roll his neck. "Now you're just starting to *piss me off.*" He drawled, finally

understanding this wouldn't just be a simple kill. "I don't know who you are, but I'll be damned if you get in my way!" He shouted as he launched himself forward again.

Erratum allowed him to charge as they unwrapped their rope dart from their arm again. He was too close to attempt to pierce him, so they had to improvise. They swung low this time, able to wrap the rope around the other's ankle. With a hard yank, Dust was once more on the ground. "I'm gonna shove that thing *so* far up your-" Erratum took this distraction to quickly round the monster as he pushed himself up to his knees. They took the remaining length of the rope in either hand and brought it around Dust's front to his cervical spine. Dust gave a strained sound as Erratum pulled back tight on the rope, effectively choking him out as he struggled.

Meanwhile, the Sans of this universe was left to marvel at the sight. Seemingly out of nowhere, this dark skeleton dropped from the sky and began to attack. Well, they didn't really *attack* the crazed killer, but they definitely were not holding back now. Sans was perplexed because this was not just a chance encounter of a monster stumbling across a scene and picking a fight. When the other had come into his world, it was like they had *known* what was happening. Like they had expected this outcome. They were actively defending Sans and, in turn, his universe and he didn't know *why*.

Dust managed to pull a knife from his jacket pocket and wildly thrust it behind himself. He couldn't see the skeleton, but he was sure with enough frenzied swipes he'd get them. Erratum hissed as the tip nicked their left zygomatic arch, causing them to pull away from the violent swipes and allowing Dust to gasp as the tight grip left his throat. He launched back at the skeleton now with frenzied swings of his knife, losing any grace of the battle in a desperate attempt to just end this monster. Erratum ducked and dodged as it swung and stabbed, feeling a trace of sweat on their brow. They needed to get him at a distance to regain an advantage in this fight. They jerked further back as a burst of magic seemed to crash between them, forcing them apart to avoid the splash of magic.

“Hey bud, didn’t forget I was here, did ya?” Sans called out as he stood a fair distance away from the scuffle.

Erratum was less than thrilled to see the monster getting involved in this fight. They knew there was no convincing him to stand down now that he already intervened, however. They just hoped this didn’t make things more difficult.

“Yeah, you’re real tough when you’ve got your pal here, aren’t ya?” Dust mocked as he stepped back, momentarily disengaging and allowing Erratum to fall back closer to Sans.

”Your assistance isn’t required. You’d be better off leaving until we’re finished.” Erratum addressed him, though their eyes remained on Dust the entire time. He seemed to be eyeing them up, mouth moving as though he were speaking to someone beside him.

"Nah, I’ve already gotten this far.” Sans shrugged back casually, as though it were more a hassle than an actual threat on his life. “Plus, this freak’s messing with my home. I think I deserve to get a few hits in.”

Erratum glanced briefly at this Sans, mentally dubbing him “Outer” in an extremely unoriginal nickname. Calling every Sans they meet “Sans” was becoming a headache. They didn’t protest as Outer cracked his knuckles before allowing his magic to spark back to life. A swirl of seven motes seemed to alight around his head, star-like in nature. Outer kept his eyes sharp as he followed Dust’s every little movement. The motes cast a large radius of light around the area, and Erratum would almost say it was pretty if they weren’t fighting for their lives.

“Can’t let you destroy this world, bud. But, for all your efforts, here,” Outer grinned as he lifted his hands threateningly. “Have a

constellation prize." Two of the orbiting motes lurched forward at this, on a straight trajectory for the monster. Dust attempted to move out of the way, but the first mote collided with the ground and the terrain simply exploded. Dust was unable to take the brunt of the rocky shrapnel and dodge the next mote at the same time. The second star collided directly with him and tore a piercing scream from the monster. Erratum was temporarily blinded by the sheer radiant explosion that followed, lifting one arm up to shield their eyes until it had died down.

"How much magic does that take?" Erratum questioned as they turned their head a moment to look at Outer once their vision returned. By the looks of him, it was no small feat.

"A lot," Outer wheezed a moment with drops of sweat rolling down his skull. "Don't worry about it, I'll live." He insisted. "Hopefully,"

Erratum didn't get a chance to respond as Dust rushed through the cloud of smoke and dirt left behind from the blast. Outer was quick to teleport out of the way, seeing that the monster charging for him. Another mote discharged in retaliation, this one rupturing the ground as it exploded. Dust cursed as he backed up, the rock crumbling away at the edge of the cliff. Erratum became hyperaware as the ground broke away under him, leaving Dust freefalling down into the abyss. Erratum acted instantaneously on instinct as they half threw themselves over the ledge, barely keeping from falling off right after him. They shot out their golden strings and barely managed to snag their wrist in their grasp. Erratum grunted as they pulled themselves to their feet, hoisting the battered and aggressive monster up out of the abyss.

"What are you doing?!" Outer shouted as Dust was splayed onto the ground, heaving weak breaths as he did. "Have you forgotten the last twenty minutes of him trying to kill us??"

"Does that mean we should be the same?"

“Oh, don’t give me that bullshit! Don’t take the moral high ground, he’s a murderer!” Outer seethed at the god’s show of mercy. “It would’ve been one less problem in the multiverse!”

Erratum frowned as they looked to Outer with disappointment. They didn’t blame their anger and want for vengeance, but they also knew he didn’t know Dust’s entire story. How Dust was *made* to be this. **”I don’t decide who gets to die.”** They simply left it at that despite the other's obvious outrage.

“You could’ve let me die.” Erratum glanced back to Dust as he managed to push himself up to his hands and knees. “Woulda been so easy. I would’ve let you fall. I woulda laughed about it.” Dust continued as he sat back on his haunches. The god approached the downed monster as he continued to speak to them. “Your friend ‘s right though, when you take the moral high ground…”

Dust turned sharply as Erratum ventured close enough, slicing his knife up and tearing through the fabric of their robe’s sleeve. “You *always* lose!” He laughed at the spill of marrow over his blade as the distal part of their radius and ulna were lacerated. Erratum cringed and clenched their teeth as they retreated, clutching their arm as it bled. They stared down at the torn sleeve of their robe, the fabric that Karma had swaddled them in when their world was destroyed. Erratum’s normal wave of cool emotions burned into an unfamiliar flame of anger as they looked back up. Dust was already in the air, however, both hands clutching his knife as he aimed to drive it down in the god’s skull. Erratum had no time to counter, throwing their hands up in a defensive crossed position above their head.

The sting of the knife never came.

Erratum looked up from where they protected their head with their arms. In front of them was a wall of blue, just transparent enough to

see through. Dust's knife was digging into the field of magic, but it would not budge under his attack. Erratum had no idea what was happening or how they were doing this, but they were grateful, nonetheless. The wall reminded them of the "coding screens" they would see when they searched through the fabric of worlds. It almost reminded them of a firewall; blocking out what they did not want to come through. More and more, Erratum was realizing the multiverse really was like a giant network.

Dust was forced back by the shockwave of magic that came from colliding with the wall, huffing as he stumbled back a few steps. "You're a tough piece of shit, I'll give you that. Why are you defending this crappy floating rock of a world? With that kind of power, you could do *anything*. You could have this multiverse wrapped around your finger like your stupid strings." He grinned as Erratum forced the wall down after a moment of trying. "You could join us, ya know? I'm sure the boss would love ya."

Erratum didn't dignify this with an answer, or even an outward response. They were tired of this battle, and they were tired of this monster. They needed to end this.

Golden strings appeared once more within their hands as they launched them forward. If they could get a hold of their soul, they could force him to yield. They didn't want it to have to come to that, but this is where they were now. Dust jerked away, however, and made another dive for the darker skeleton. Erratum yanked their hand reflexively as strings shot out of the fingertips of their damaged arm. These far missed their mark, piercing straight through the frontal bone of the monster. Dust seized up as his body went ramrod straight while Erratum stared with disbelief at where they were connected. There was no wound, no sign of breakage. It was like when they passed through Blue's chest to their soul, but this felt different.

They could hear voices, sounds, screams. Echoes of the past within their mind drowning out the calm ocean of whispering voices. Erratum squeezed their eyes shut at the sensation, immediately being flooded with flashing imagery as well. Piles of dust, monsters fleeing,

children screaming. They saw it as though they were the one doing it all. There was a distinct lingering image of a child, they recognized them as Chara, under them as a sharp bone was impaled into their chest.

Over, and over, and over, and over again.

Erratum forced their eyes open after this, hands trembling at the searing pain that was stabbing through their skull. Dust was on the ground at this point, muttering nonsense between wails and partially seizing on the ground. Erratum managed to finally sever the connection, Dust going still on the ground as Erratum leaned against Outer a moment as he ran to their aid. After a moment of catching their breath, they managed to support their own weight again, thanking Outer quietly.

”Leave. You can tell your boss I send him my regards if he continues to attempt to tip the balance. I will be a roadblock in your way at every turn from now on. This is the only warning I will give you; if any of you come into these worlds again to corrupt them, I will take you down.” Erratum promised with a sharp glare down at the wheezing monster. To his credit, Dust chose not to say anything and simply fell through a dark portal that formed beneath him.

And just like that, it was quiet.

Outer panted as the motes dissipated, leaning down as his hands rested on his knees. “Jeeze… you practice that dramatic monologue?” He joked with a huff of a laugh. Erratum turned to him and rested their hand on his head gently. Outer frowned as he stood up straight again, the hand moving with him. “Hey… you’re bleeding a bit, you know that?”

Erratum frowned as they followed their eyes to the cut in their robe. Their bones and hand on that arm were stained with marrow. **"This is going to be a pain to fix."** They sighed as they swiped their thumb over the cut on their face. **"Your world should stabilize soon enough. After that, the world should force a reset to fix this… mess."** They glanced around at the various craters and rubble lining the ground.

"Right, yeah okay… that'd be nice." Outer sighed as he straightened up and brushed his coat off. "By the way, who are you anyway? Never seen you around here or at the council before." He questioned curiously.

Council? Interesting.

"Erratum. I've recently received the name Errata as well, however, because it is 'godlier'." Erratum still didn't know what was wrong with their name, but far be it from them to stifle their Little light's creativity.

"Godlier? Okay…" Outer didn't bother to question this as he shoved his hands back into his coat pockets. "Well, I'm glad *you* came at least. The Stars are kind of late to the party at this point." He sighed with a shrug. "You could stick around and explain all that to Blue, Ink, and Dream though."

"Yeah, I have to go." Erratum immediately replied as they tore a rift into reality. There was *zero chance* they were going to stick around for the creator to pop in. **"If you ever do need me, just send a prayer. I'll hear it."** Outer didn't have a chance to question them before they were through the portal and gone.

"What the hell just happened?" Outer questioned the air around him, turning around a few times to check his surroundings. "That really

happened, right? All of that was real, right?"

"Who are you talking to?"

Outer whipped back around to see three vibrant skeletons making their way to the decimated clearing. Dream gripped tightly onto his staff as he observed the destruction. "I think we're a little late…" He spoke with a touch of embarrassment.

"Yeah, we would have been here sooner, but *someone* kept going on about this crazy skeleton they were talking to." Ink laughed while Blue pouted up at him. "Anyway, did you take care of Dust then?"

"Well… kind of?" Outer frowned as he tried to find a way to explain what happened. "Honestly, I was about to die, got trapped out here by myself. Then out of nowhere, there was just this skeleton. Black bones, gold strings, real strange…"

"Errata was here?!" Blue gasped, while Ink's eyes began to shift shapes rapidly at this. "I *told* you they were real! That's where they rushed off to so quick!" He beamed brightly.

"Yeah, that was their name. You know them? I've never seen them around before."

Blue nodded enthusiastically in response to this. "Yeah! They're my god! They come when they hear you ask for help!" Outer seemed a little skeptical of this, but he did recall how the other claimed their other name was 'godlier', as they put it.

"Well, whoever they are, I'm glad they were here to help!" Dream cut

in as he dismissed his staff. “Sorry we didn’t get here in time, but we’ll do better next time!” He promised. Ink rolled his eyes a bit at this and waved them off.

“Yeah, yeah. Let’s go then! I can get back to those blueprints I was making for my AU!” Ink grinned as he quickly vanished through a puddle of ink.

Dream sighed as he turned back to Outer with a pleading expression. “I’m sorry about him. You know he’s a little spastic and… airheaded.” He wrung his hands together as he spoke, gloves making small sounds under the friction.

“Heh, yeah I know. He’s doin’ his best.” Outer assured with a wave of his hand. “Thanks for droppin’ by, but things are gonna be okay now. I’ll see you all later, okay?” He dismissed them. Dream gave a friendly wave back as he started to walk back out of the clearing. “Blue, you coming?” He called back.

“One second!” Blue replied as he hurried to Outer a moment. “So, they fought right? Was it cool? Was it super epic?” He half demanded with excitement. Outer gave a nervous laugh at the other's insistence but nodded after a moment.

“Yeah, it was actually really impressive. They talk kind of funny though…”

“They’re just trying to sound all-wise.” Blue laughed a bit before steeling himself a moment. “Say… did they do the head thing to you?” He questioned. Outer gave him an odd look at this, to which Blue sighed. “You know! The… putting their hand on your head?”

“Oh! Yeah, yeah they did.”

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“It has come to my attention that not only have you failed a rather *simple* task I sent you on, but you also managed to, how did Killer say it, ‘get your ass thoroughly whooped’. Is that correct?”

Dust gritted his teeth as he kept his head bowed and silently seethed. “…Yes, my king.” He barely had any time to react as a cold appendage wrapped around his neck and hoisted him into the air. Dust choked a moment as his hands gripped onto the offending appendage, finally meeting the eye of the monster.

“How am I to expand my territory if my team is *useless?* If you can’t even cause misery to a single world, then what use do I have for you?” Nightmare growled as he stood from his throne and pulled his minion down closer to eye level. “What excuse do you have that you think will make me spare your life?” He demanded.

“There was someone else!” Dust choked out as he clawed at the tarlike substance around his throat. “Came out of thin air! Looked like no one I’ve ever seen!” He gasped as he was released, coughing harshly as he laid prone at Nightmare’s feet.

The tendrils retreated behind their master, twisting, and flicking irritably. Nightmare glowered his single eye down at Dust. “Explain.” He demanded before settling back into his throne. “Before I change my mind.”

Dust quickly got back onto his knees, looking up at him this time as he recounted his tale to him. “It was another skeleton…they had black bones and gold around their eyes. They could make these tough as shit golden strings that wouldn’t cut. Threw me around real good… then I slipped off the edge of Outertale. But for some reason, they caught me and brought me back up. What an idiot,” Dust sneered at the memory, slightly humiliated at the idea. “Then…” He trailed off, breath hitching as he recalled the sharp stab of the strings in his mind, living

through his worst memories.

“Then?” Nightmare pressed on; attention thoroughly caught. “Your fear, while delicious, demands an explanation. Only *I* should invoke such visceral terror.”

Dust really didn’t want to talk about it, but he knew Nightmare cared very little about what he felt. “Those strings just… went straight through my skull. They got in my head… it was so painful. It pulled me back into my world, back into my memories. I… I was there again, killing everyone. I could feel their dust, hear their screams…” He muttered borderline hysteric at this point. Nightmare ignored his mental state in favour of mulling this new information over. “They told me to send you their regards… if you kept messing with the multiverse. Said they’re gonna start fighting us off.” He warned him.

Nightmare let out a series of cruel laughs at this, his hand resting on his forehead as he leaned back into his throne. The insane sound echoed around the spacious room as he pulled himself back together. A single tendril came up to wipe an imaginary tear from his eye as he sighed. “Is that so?” He chuckled as he steepled his hands together. “Then I look forward to our imminent meeting.”

Chapter End Notes

Anyone who can find the d&d spell-inspired attack gets bonus points.

So yeah, again, fight scenes? Who's she? We don't know her.

Appearance of the spooky dark boys though! They may or may not have significance to this story.

Chapter 5: Taking in a stray

Chapter Summary

> Following their battle and discovery of new abilities, Erratum attempts to explore the extent of what they can do. Through clever manipulation and days of practice, they are able to go places they hadn't before. Along the way, they meet a peculiar new friend.

Chapter Notes

> Yeah hi, uh, it's been a bit. Nursing school, as always. This was supposed to have more content to it than this, but I got a little wrapped up in these two beans. Again, I'm out here to put soothing balms on tragic and sad stories and characters. This is entirely self-indulgent. Enjoy.

Trying to force the multiverse to bend to their will was significantly tougher than Erratum had originally thought it would be.

By no means did they expect it to be a *simple* task, but the extent of what they could do was what made it difficult. There were so many commands and secrets they had to figure out through sheer trial and error. After the incident in Outertale, they had spent some time in their mind meditating and contemplating on the universe. They came to understand that the multiverse wasn’t truly like a machine or network like they had assumed, but it merely presented itself that way to them. The multiverse was so complex that it was impossible to comprehend, so it transferred its complex rules and language into a form they could understand. Thus, this plane became very much a large network to Erratum with various commands, configurations, and blueprints. It was a thrilling revelation as it allowed them to narrow their actions and power down to a more specific art. No longer did they have to delve into the direct code of each universe. They found that they could pull up what they considered their “command

window" when needed. It displayed everything they needed to know immediately, such as their location and the current universe, as well as at the ready for command inputs. It was convenient, but they weren't sure why they could suddenly do all these things.

Another thing they had been experimenting with was their apparent new magical abilities that had made themselves known. It had taken a few days to perfect calling upon their firewall protection after their initial accidental display. Considering they had made themselves an enemy of some powerful criminals, it would certainly come in handy. After the strings incident as well, Erratum had a sneaking suspicion they could even influence others through direct contact with their souls. They assumed it would be much like hacking into a program or connection, but they didn't dare attempt it yet. They already knew they could act as an antivirus, but what they wanted to know is if they could manipulate data and create backdoors to them.

For several days, they had been attempting to reach the call of another soul who prayed to them daily. Several times a day, at times. The only issue was every time they tried to open a rift in their universe, they were met with resistance. It was as if the universe was on lockdown, which lead them to believe something had gone awry within it. Erratum had attempted to reach them before with similar results, but now they had new tricks in their arsenal. They currently had their command window open, a series of translucent blue windows that wrapped around them. A few windows popped in and out of existence every now and then as they needed, turning their head a moment to view a screen before turning back to the one in front of them. Creating a backdoor would hopefully allow them to essentially "sneak in" to this universe without being detected. From there, hopefully, they could disable whatever strange power was keeping it locked down.

It took a couple of frustrating hours, but their work finally bore fruit when their empty rift suddenly gave way and allowed them to pass. Erratum breathed a sigh of relief as they stepped through and closed the tear behind them. The universe around them was… entirely void. Erratum looked around in confusion as several blue windows popped around them with various error signs in response. They quickly shooed them away before venturing in further. "**I was certain I had**

the correct location… perhaps I still need to work on this. I would think I'd passed into the void if it weren't for the severe lack of molecular destruction." They mused.

As they ventured further, they began to see some colour in the distance. Well, white was still a refreshing colour in this sea of black. They slowed their speed as they grew closer, seeing a monster sitting cross-legged on the ground facing away from them. Erratum recognized the screen in front of the monster as the "save screen", as it was called. Usually, this was not visible to anyone other than the fallen human, but this seemed to be an exception. They stood a bit away from the monster, not wanting to startle them when they spoke. "**You've been calling for me."**

The monster swiftly jumped to their feet, whipping around with their arm extended. Erratum noticed the summoned blaster beside the alarmed monster and swiftly pulled their firewall up with a flick of their wrist. The blast of energy collided with the digital wall, which held strong under the assault. The monster jolted back as the blaster faded from existence as quickly as it had manifested. "Who are you? You're not Sans." He demanded with suspicion. Erratum compared him to a hungry and frightened animal.

"**Not the one you're expecting I'm sure."** Erratum agreed as they allowed their protective wall to fall. "**You were not easy to get to, my Lonely heart. Your universe is… strange."**

"What do you want with me?" The skeleton demanded of the god. Erratum took a moment to observe the monster that was currently threatening them. They look nearly like the original Sans, well, if it weren't for the giant gaping wound across his chest and pixilation around his eye. It certainly didn't look comfortable, and combined with this endless void, Erratum was genuinely surprised the other hadn't lost their mind yet.

"**No, this is quite the opposite. It is more what do *you* want from**

***me*?"** Erratum emphasized as they moved their hand over a screen that popped up beside them. "**These are your prayers, aren't they?"** They questioned as the window slid over to the monster. The wounded skeleton still appeared wary but did look over the presented screen. His face rapidly changed as he read what was on the screen and glanced up at the god.

"Is this a joke? How do you have all of this?" He demanded as the screen vanished. Erratum frowned at the hinted accusation.

"**These were the prayers you gave me. It wasn't easy to get to you, but I can see why that is now. Your world is… a little broken, I would call it."** Erratum frowned down at their screen as they pulled up the layout of this world. "**It's as if your pathway is incomplete… like someone stopped writing the story halfway through."** They continued with faint confusion. They had heard the creator could be quite forgetful, but to leave a world unfinished? Especially when *this* was the state he left it in? "**Geno, is it?"** They checked as they read through their information on the screen. It was also convenient to be able to pull up the inhabitants of the universe and learn more about them.

"Broken is putting it lightly." Geno huffed before freezing in place. "How do you know that? How do you know my name?" He demanded of the darker skeleton before him. "If you really *were* a god, you would have helped me a long time ago. You would have fixed this… you would have stopped all of this." He clenched his fists tightly to refrain from attacking again. He only further seethed seeing the pitying expression the other held.

"It was not my intention to ignore you. As I said, you were not possible to reach until now. Stopping the resets and genocides is outside of my control. The Guardians have set this into place and much like the laws of nature, you cannot change that." Erratum did feel bad, they really did. They couldn't imagine being subjected to this Fate repeatedly. They would be lying if they said they didn't hold some resentment toward Fate for the events that had led to the domino effect to where they stood now.

“The Guardians? That’s some myth crap you’re talking about. I’m not buying it.” Geno growled as the other continued to test him. “I suppose you come from a nice cushy surface world. Resets must be easier when you don’t have to wind up buried back under the ground again.”

"I wouldn’t know, I have no universe. While at some point I had belonged somewhere, the being that I am now was not crafted in this multiverse. I reside in a timeless space between realities where The Guardians allowed me to refuge after my creating.” It was a difficult thing to try to explain, and their social skills still weren’t the best. **"And The Guardians are very much real. Destiny, Fate, Time, Magic, Hope, Faith…Karma. As a judge, you should be quite familiar with that one. Who do you think blessed you with that power?”** They watched the other contemplate this and knew they had at least made a small bit of progress.

“That… still sounds hard to believe. Fine, let’s say you’re telling the truth. Let’s say you’re really a god and you’re really here to help me.” Geno scoffed as he held his arms up and gestured to the landscape around him. “Fix it.” He challenged the other. Erratum hummed a bit as they initiated what they equivalated to a troubleshooter. This was a tricky case as they were no creator by any means. Perhaps with a bit of work they could find ways to manipulate the environment through complex coding. As it was, it seemed the only real difference from the original universe was the possession of determination Geno had. It seemed to keep him stuck in this space instead of returning to his universe when a reset was initiated. Another Sans seemed to have taken his place when the universe attempted to force correct the issue in self-preservation.

"Well, it’s not going to be easy. Your determination is keeping you from slipping back into your universe. Think of your body as a water molecule and your universe as having a phospholipid layer surrounding it and you’re on the tail end of it.”

“The tail end... so the hydrophobic area. It repels me.” Geno frowned at this. “You’re saying I’m screwed?”

"I never said such a thing.” Erratum spoke with clear confusion on their face. **“I can attempt to manipulate the code to accept you, but I am uncertain as to what that result would look like…”** They answered honestly with their hand over the command hesitantly.

Geno seemed to mull this over in his mind a moment before nodding his head. “I’m willing to try anything at this point.”

Erratum nodded as they ran the ping command. Hopefully, it would show any sort of break in connection that they could manipulate to their need. Things didn’t seem to work out as smoothly as they hoped, however. They pulled their hand back as the ground quaked beneath them, the entire void seeming to flicker and pulsate a moment. Erratum held their hands in front of them as if attempting to placate the universe until it passed. They exhaled in relief as it did, dismissing their console. **"This…may not be safe with you here.”** Erratum concluded.

Geno was wide-eyed, hands shaking as he looked at the other. “You think so?! What the hell was that??” He demanded of them. “Do you even know what you’re doing?”

"I told you I didn’t know what the result would be. This is a task much larger than anyone has ever asked of me. It might take some creativity and experimenting to find a way to fix it.” Well, the god was at least extremely forthcoming with him. Geno sighed and flopped back onto the ground with his arms crossed.

“Great, guess I’ll be stuck here while you’re figuring it out.”

"I do not mind taking you back to my plane. It is expansive and accommodating." Geno tensed up at this offer. He wanted to take it, he really, *really* did, but…

"I can't leave the save screen… I'm barely hanging on the way it is, ya know?" He laughed bitterly. "The moment I leave, I'll die. The only thing keeping me alive is the fact time is basically paused here." He placed a hand gingerly over the seeping wound with a disappointed expression. Erratum tilted their head and crouched in front of him. Geno gave them an annoyed look as their hand came to rest atop his head.

"As I said before, time does not exist in my plane. It is only manipulated by my command." They really made this offer tempting, but Geno wasn't so sure about it. He'd do anything to get a break from the endless darkness and loneliness. **"You are afraid, I can understand that. I would not offer this to you if I believed it would harm you."**

"Just… what if it's not the same? What if my body doesn't agree with where it is and dusts?" He *was* afraid, and despite how miserable his existence might be, he didn't want to die. Erratum stood again from the ground and allowed the golden strings to pull back reality for them. Geno quickly got back to his feet as he approached it, fascinated by its existence. **"Let your hand pass through it first. Perhaps seeing that the appendage is unharmed will reassure you."** That seemed fair, right? Better his hand disintegrates than his entire body.

Geno steeled his nerves and shakily rose his hand in front of himself. It stopped just shy of the portal, tremors increasing at the mere idea of passing through. He jolted as he felt the god rest their own hand on top of his to steady it. They watched Geno closely as they guided it slowly through the opening before him. Geno clenched his eyes shut as it passed through, waiting for the pain of it dusting.

It never came.

He slowly opened his sockets and marveled at the site. His entire arm was reaching into a different world and there were no adverse effects. He was still in one piece. “I’ll be damned…” He breathed. Erratum gave him a pleased smile as they fully stepped through the portal first. They kept their hand on Geno’s, not pulling him or forcing him along, but offering guidance and leverage if he chose to follow. The wounded monster still felt extreme apprehension, but slowly raised his leg to step through. Once one foot was on the ground, it was a little easier to pull his entire body through. Once again, he tensed up and hunched his shoulders down.

Nothing happened.

He felt as though his breath had been stolen from him as he looked around this new world. It was so colourful, so beautiful. There was grass for miles, trees, flowers… there was a sky. He tilted his head back as he observed it, watching the clouds roll along the vast ceiling. The whole place looked like a botanical zen garden, but nothing interested him more than that sky. “It’s warm…”

Erratum felt their soul clench tightly with shared anguish. They weren’t sure how long the other had been stuck in their situation, but it was long enough to have lasting effects, they were sure. "**I find the landscape of nature to be more relaxing than settling in a home. I am the only one that lives here, so I settle for simplicity.”**

“*This* is your idea of simplicity? It’s the most complex thing I’ve ever seen! This entire situation is the most complex thing I’ve ever experienced! And that’s saying something!” Geno stammered in disbelief as he turned to view the monster. Looking at them in the sunlight, and gosh wasn’t that a *wonderful* statement, he realized how ethereal the other really did appear. Shades of gold and black with a complex symbol engraved into their skull. “What is your name?” He finally asked. The god have him a small upturn of the mouth at his question.

"Errata. Erratum, if you find the casualness more acceptable."

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Adjusting to having another person around was interesting, to say the least. Not unwelcomed, but definitely a different experience.

Erratum had no experience with roommates or being a host, at least not in this form, so they were winging it at this point. They had thrown out the idea of remaining mostly hands-off in the multiverse and apparently decided to go the opposite direction. Removing a key person from their universe seemed as hands-on as one could get. It was for a good cause of course, but that didn't mean Erratum was in a rush to speak to The Guardians about it.

The first day was spent observing Geno adjust to his new environment. Seeing him kneel on the grass and touch it with his hands as though it were a visual hallucination brought agony back to Erratum's soul. They did their best to keep their view on the creator at a strong disdain. Hate would do no good to any party and only led to dark paths. Still, it was difficult to not hold a great deal of resentment for the suffering he put countless worlds through. Erratum elected not to reveal any of this to Geno; he didn't need to know that his tale was written this tragically intentionally. Erratum had changed it and that was what mattered in the end. Now, they were only having issues attempting to adjust to a mortal in their realm. How did one take care of another living being?

Geno had denied a want for a residence in a home or the construction of anything. He had expressed a desire to stay out in the open where he could remind himself this was real. Erratum could respect that, and so they merely strung their golden threads tightly to fasten a sturdy
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hammock between a few trees. A couple of pillows and a blanket and it was perfectly inhabitable. Geno seemed happy at least, which in turn made Erratum happy. He also seemed to marvel at the god's ability to change the environment at will.

"This is my plane of existence. I control when it is light, when it is dark, the growth of the grass, and I can bring it all back to zero if I wish." This blew the bleeding skeleton's mind, especially as he saw the speckle of stars Erratum brought forth for him at his timid request.

Erratum wasn't sure how much time had passed as, again, there was no concept of time here. It was enough time for them to repair their robe at least. The golden strings they produced made for a sturdy stitching material, after all. With one sleeve stitched all the way around in tight X's, the god had grudgingly sliced the other sleeve off as well for symmetry. Both sleeves were now held on with threads of gold. At least now it looked the same on each side, though they were sure to give Dust a proper thrashing if they crossed paths again.

"Where'd you learn how to sew?"

Erratum glanced up at Geno at the question as he plopped down in front of them. **"I'm not certain, I simply know."** They explained with a slight shrug. **"Perhaps I have always known how to do it. Perhaps it is a skill I learned before I was taken to this new life."** It didn't really matter either way, in Erratum's opinion. They had far larger things to spend their time pondering on.

"You have a strange way of talking."

"So I've been told." There was no bite to this, in fact, the god smiled faintly. They were aware while not bizarre, their speech pattern and word choices were formal and cryptic at the same time. Hey, they

were centuries old and only started speaking to other monsters the last fifty of them. "**Does that bother you?”**

Geno snorted a bit as they sat forward in a tripod position. Erratum silently wondered if it was to help him breathe easier with the wound pressing into his ribs. “Nah, you should have heard how my bro talked. Strange is good.” He reassured them as he absently picked at the blades of grass. Erratum hummed in response to this, showing that they were still listening. As they looked up, a peculiar sight greeted them and caused them to stop their absent weaving of threads.

Right there, just at the back of his second cervical vertebrae was the symbol of Karma. Erratum would recognize it anywhere. They had never noticed it before, but that might have been because, with the way Geno was leaning forward and looking down, it was much more visible.

Why?

”Would you mind holding still a moment?” They spoke suddenly as they raised their hand to run their fingers over the marking.

“Uh, sure, why do you-?!” Geno locked up a moment at the sudden touch. “Uh?? What are you-?”

Time seemed to slow as the marking reacted to the god’s touch. The engraving filled and gleamed with a golden light, and similarly too did the marking upon Erratum’s frontal bone. Their eye lights vanished from their sockets, or rather, it appeared the entirety of both orbits lit up with white. They felt as though they were thrown from their body into another dimension, untethered and flailing. Looking around, they realized they were back in the dark void of Geno’s world. They could see the damaged monster standing in front of that save screen, speaking with another version of himself.

This was strange on a new level Erratum didn't think they could reach. Not after the introduction of the voices.

Erratum approached the two monsters curiously, but they didn't seem to notice. In fact, as Erratum moved their hand, it seemed to pass through them and distort the image a moment. It was as though they were made of smoke. The god frowned in confusion as they listened to the conversation instead. They noticed the way Geno spoke to this Sans; how he attempted to make a deal with him. They could see his intentions and read his thoughts without even truly hearing them. The desperation led him to manipulate his replacement to attempt to kill the Chara of this world. To attempt to stop the cycle of suffering.

Erratum believed they understood what this was all about now. They believed they knew why Geno appeared the way he was.

Erratum blinked a few times as they felt their body again. They realized belatedly that they hadn't moved from where they had been sitting. They remained behind Geno, hand resting on his neck. Perhaps it was much like when they shifted realities to speak with The Guardians. There was time to linger on that thought later, for now…

"You carry your pain as a way to carry your guilt. Your endless flow of blood, the ever present wound a visible penance of your sins."

Geno turned around to face Erratum after their hand released him, giving the skeleton a perturbed look. "I'm sorry? Is this another one of your strange ways of talking?" He questioned, eyes darting up briefly as he noticed the mark on their forehead filled with golden magic. "Uh, you're glowing…"

"**You could never get Sans to listen to you. No matter how many times you pulled him into your world and changed your story. You couldn't stop the killing. You couldn't stop Chara.**" Erratum didn't need to meet Geno's eyes to know the other was paying attention. "**You hold guilt because of this. Not only this but because of your ultimate goal; to erase your entire world.**"

Geno felt as though an icy knife had been shoved straight through the small shard of soul he still had. He couldn't feel his hands, and he didn't think he could move even if he wanted to. He was frozen to the spot, exposed for what he truly was. He was foolish to think a god wouldn't be able to figure it out. "…What are you gonna do to me?" He managed to breathe; the terror was evident in his voice.

Erratum stared at him a moment, able to sense the waves of fear rolling off him. They raised their hand, ignoring the immediate flinch it earned and placed it on the skeleton's head. "**Do you regret it?**"

"Regret…?" Geno frowned at the question, not expecting it. "It… it was the only way. There was no other hope. The best way for me to protect everyone from harm was to end it permanently. It might sound dark and cruel but… after so many lifetimes, you get desperate. I just… I wanted it to stop."

Erratum gave no indication of what they were thinking regarding his answer. Geno furrowed his brow bone a moment as he tried to read the other. He then realized he hadn't technically answered their question. They were waiting to hear it.

"I…I do. I never wanted to hurt anyone. I didn't want to become the very thing I set out to destroy…" Geno admitted after a few moments of tense silence. "I thought what I was doing was mercy… maybe I'm just selfish. Maybe I just wanted to stop hurting and disguised it with righteous intentions. Heh, I'm no god, Errata. I can't fix things like you can."

Erratum gave a slow nod at this as they seemed to accept this answer. **“I believe you, and I don’t believe it was driven entirely out of selfishness. Desperation, yes, but you always thought of your home. At the very least, you thought about your brother.”** They managed to place their hand over the back of Geno’s neck again after a moment. **"I think you have suffered these consequences long enough.”** Sympathy laced their tone as their grip tightened on his cervical spine.

”I free you from your suffering.”

Geno didn’t have time to comprehend everything they were saying before they felt what he could only describe as static across his bones. The chronic burning pain against his chest seemed to recede, easing up until he felt he could fully expand his ribs and *breathe.* The glitching pixelations rolling across his body eased before vanishing from him entirely. His clothes were still drenched with blood, and a quick pass of his hand over the right side of his skull confirmed its deformed state. But it didn’t *hurt.* He didn’t ache, and he almost felt whole. As whole as he could with a ninth of a soul, at least.

“Y..you..”

"As long as you are a resident here, you shall want for nothing. You will also not suffer needlessly when your lesson has already been learned.” Erratum cut him off as they held their hand up to stop his inevitable babble of gratitude.

Geno gave a sound of disbelief, almost scoffing at the sheer magnitude. He was at a loss for words as he absently felt along his ribs. They didn’t feel as though they’d crumble away to shards at the slightest movement anymore. “How could I possibly ever repay you? How could I ever do anything even a fraction of the amount you’ve done for me?” He looked back up at Erratum, not even able to muster

up any normal annoyance by the slightly amused expression on their face.

”That’s easy,” They assured, watching as Geno leaned in at this with full attention.

”Live for me, Geno.”

Chapter 6: What's one more?

Chapter Summary

Erratum continues to search for answers within Aftertale, only to leave early due to a surprise visit from Ink. A new monster calls out to Erratum, and the scene they arrive in leads to an interesting confrontation.

Chapter Notes

Oh hey, it's me again. This chapter was more establishing Erratum's presence in the universe and revealing their existence. I have finals coming up, so not sure when I'll post next. I'll keep doing my best though, as this keeps me sane during it all. Enjoy!

Geno became a slightly different monster after their confrontation with Erratum. The god didn't view this as a bad thing, rather it seemed to have a positive impact on him. He didn't spend much of his time alone, sulking and refusing to acknowledge his environment anymore. The skeleton seemed to become more fascinated with everything, in fact, including Erratum. Erratum supposed this was due to his original lack of trust and belief in them originally. He asked a lot of questions, and the god didn't mind indulging him most of the time. They tried to avoid anything regarding the other's world, not certain if they were ready to explain that.

Overall, life was peaceful.

Erratum reflected upon that as they delved through the codes of Aftertale, as they had come to learn it as. They occasionally returned here alone to study the base components and makeup of the world to discover a solution for Geno. They had promised to try, and they would be remiss to ignore that. Sanses had something about promises.

Just as Erratum expected, this universe appeared to have a full story completely outlined for it. It appeared as if someone had canceled an execution command, at least that's how it presented to Erratum's mind. They attempted to understand the creator's logic in this decision; were they unhappy with how he originally designed this world? Did he plan to change aspects of the story? Whatever it was, he had left this world in a state of incompletion, and now Erratum was trying to sort out the mess. The god grumbled quietly to themselves, reminding themselves once again not to hold contempt, as they pulled up both Geno and the replacement copy of Sans side by side. Cross-referencing these two, the god found them to be nearly identical. The biggest issue they were stumped on was Geno's determination. As far as they knew, this wasn't a property they could simply strip from him either; it was an essential integration of his code. Perhaps the appearance of this replacement Sans is what prompted the creator to pause this story? Maybe they were attempting to find a way to incorporate both of them into this story.

Erratum had a bad habit of making excuses for Ink.

"Other copies in different universes exist with determination properties. There should theoretically be no reason why Geno couldn't survive within the world. Correct?" The god glanced over at a screen that popped up, which simply gave them a question mark in response. They waved away the unhelpful response from their program. **"That was rhetorical. Perhaps if I dig deep enough, I may discover the completed timeline for this story. In the event that I am able to, I could force execute it through admin permissions. I would have to bring Geno back, however, and force them through the events of everything…"** It wasn't ideal, but once it reached a resolution, Erratum could fix the messy bits up again. Perhaps they could even lock the world back down again, perhaps like their own plane existed. This would allow Erratum to come and go as they pleased, as well as anyone Geno allowed them to program in. A part of them hoped the creator would not be on that access list.

Erratum paused as warning signs began to pop all over their screen and in various windows. They glanced up in alarm as the sound of

bubbling liquid filled the black space. They quickly closed all their windows and made a hasty retreat. The last way they wanted their first meeting to go was while they were actively pulling apart from one of his precious worlds. Call it a tactical retreat, for now. They breathed a sigh of relief as the portal closed to Geno's world. Looks like sniffing out that storyline would have to wait until another time. Still, they were onto a good lead, and they finally had some information they could give to Geno. That should put a little hope into the monster.

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“This isn’t good…” Ink muttered as he placed a hand against his cheek and frowned. No one else could enter or leave this space except him. Had something gone catastrophically wrong? Did he screw up keeping this area contained? “Oh well! Guess I’ll actually get there on time then!” He grinned as he sunk away in a mess of ink. He popped back up in the meeting hall of their base, grabbing onto Dream’s ankles as he half reformed halfway through his portal. Dream gave a startled yelp as they jerked forward, glowering back at Ink as he laughed and fully rose from his ink.

“I hate it when you do that.” Dream informed him as he crossed his arms and watched the artist hop up to sit on the meeting table. “And I hate it when you don’t use the chairs we provided.”

“You need to loosen up! This is my table, so my butt can sit here if it feels like it.” Ink informed him as he began sketching in his book, only half-listening to his lecture.

“The point is showing you have some respect for the others here.” Dream frowned as Ink rolled his shifting eyelights before returning to drawing. “Did you talk to Geno at least? You’re actually on time for once. That makes me feel like you forgot.” He eyed the other skeptically as he did. Ink frowned as he considered this before looking up again.

“Oh, right! Yeah, no he’s gone.” Ink explained with a shrug of his shoulders. The room fell silent a moment as Dream stared at him with wide eyes.

“And that doesn’t concern you?!”

“What am I supposed to do about it?” Ink questioned him as the other

meeting Sanses began to talk amongst themselves in worry. “I’m annoyed he isn’t where he’s supposed to be, but I can’t run across the entire multiverse searching for him. If he managed to get out, he’s probably dead anyway.” He offered with a half shrug. Dream flinched a bit at the callous wording the other chose.

“Don’t say it like that! This is serious! What if Nightmare found a way to breach through your defenses? How long will it be before he’s able to find our world and breach through this one as well?” Dream attempted to drive home the seriousness of the situation, which seemed to work on most everyone else present. “We need to find out what happened to him!”

“I’m open to any ideas you have then. A séance maybe?” Ink suggested sarcastically as the positive spirit slowly began to lose his patience. Blue had stood by throughout the argument, not having the energy to try and break it up. He was still adjusting to active memories of resets, and though he knew it wasn’t going to be easy or pleasant, it was way more intense than he anticipated. “I’m going to see if Errata knows anything about this.” He informed the both of them as he settled on the ground cross-legged. “At least it’s more productive than bickering.”

“You’ve gotten sassier lately.” Ink snorted with amusement. “And how do you plan on doing that just sitting on the floor?” He didn’t receive a response from Blue, who appeared to be deeply concentrating with his eyes closed.

“Errata can hear your prayers.” Ink paused at this, turning his head down the table to the person who spoke up.

“That’s what they told me at least. That’s how they came to defend my world.” Outer explained as he tapped his fingers against the hardwood of the table. “They said if I ever needed help to just send a prayer out and they’d hear it.”

“Riiight… sounds kind of delusional, but okay.” Ink drawled out as he listened to their tale. He glanced over at the original Sans as he cleared his throat, which caught everyone else’s attention. He had a large sway over the group considering he was both the oldest creation and the original idea for the entire multiverse. “You have something to add?” Ink prompted.

“Yeah,” Sans replied as he glanced around the expansive table. “Outer’s right. I assume you’re talking about Erratum, right?” He questioned, to which Outer nodded his head. “My world got stuck in a genocide loop that never reached a resolution. Kept skipping backward and restarting, repeatedly.” He didn’t like thinking about that. He was certain he stood in that hall for weeks that last stretch of time. “I prayed for someone to make it stop, and that’s when they appeared to me.” The table broke out into soft murmurs.

“What did they look like?” Sci questioned, ever curious about the going-ons of the universes.

“Their bones are black, and last time I saw them, they had these golden lines around their eyes. I’ve seen them on their arms as well. It looks like ley lines over their body, and they use these golden strings. Saw them pull the human’s soul clean from their body with them in under five seconds.” Sans explained as he recounted the tale in his mind. “I still see them occasionally in my world doing whatever it is they do. Routine scans and maintenance they call it. Hell if I know what gods do all day.”

“There *have* been various reports of a darker skeleton sighted in other universes.” Dream commented as he looked to Ink. “I had worried it was Nightmare at first, but no one reported any deaths or destruction. I’m guessing this is the monster everyone had been seeing. I guess if they’re not hurting anyone, then it’s not a big deal?” He didn’t like how Ink’s face was set, however. The other seemed to be growing progressively more irritated.

The debate was halted as a small, strange portal was opened just above Blue's head. A golden thread descended down and deposited a scrap of paper in front of the monster before it retreat back through the portal, which then promptly closed. Blue beamed proudly as he grabbed the paper and got back to his feet. "I told you they'd have some answers!"

"Okay, well, what does it say?" Dream questioned hesitantly. He was still attempting to wrap his head around the idea that there was some god out there he wasn't aware of. He hadn't heard of any full-blown celestial beings being directly in the multiverse, only those told in myths that resided outside of it. The closest this multiverse had were demigods like Ink and Reaper, while himself and his estranged brother were spirit embodiments of emotions. He moved with Ink to peer over Blue's shoulders, admiring the neat golden script written on the page.

"Little Light- that's what they call me," Blue quickly explained before continuing. "I apologize for not personally answering your request. I can sense you are among a large gathering of monsters, and I would rather not be a part of it. Geno is safely within my realm where he will stay for the time being. His world is dysfunctional and lonely-"

"Dysfunctional?!" Ink sputtered in offense, only to be rudely hushed.

"And he pleaded for me to take him away while I looked further into it. You know how to reach me if you require anything further," The end of the page was inscribed with a fancy "E" in the same golden script. "Well! Guess that's explained! Errata will keep him safe, trust me. They've helped me a lot too!" Blue puffed up proudly as he passed the note down the table for the rest of them to appraise.

"How come no one has bothered to tell me that there has been someone messing around with my worlds?" Ink questioned the group of skeletons present. "Has anyone considered it might be a *bad thing*

for some stranger to manipulate the storylines of your worlds?" He stared directly at the original Sans as he said this.

"Is it only okay when you do it?" Ink turned his eyelights onto Red, the Underfell variant of the group. "I mean, is that what's got you all pissy? Cause someone else is able to mess around with worlds like you do?" He snickered a bit. "Look at you, you totally are. Your eyes always give away what little you've got goin' on in yer brain." He gave a series of amused cackles at this, but Dream was quick to intervene.

"That's enough, quit provoking each other." He demanded as he gave both a sharp look. "At the end of the day, they aren't hurting anyone. It sounds like they might even be helping! Outer told us they were the one that drove back Dust when we didn't get there in time, remember?" Dream reminded the irritated creator.

"Yer asking a lot of him."

"You hush!" Dream scolded the amused Fell counterpart. Dream took the note as it rounded back to him, handing it over to Blue. The swap monster beamed and carefully tucked it away for safekeeping. "Now, can we *please* get on with business?"

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in mind.

“You’re back earlier than normal.” Erratum looked up as Geno came into view. The god moved to settle on the grassy terrain with a soft sigh and nodded. **“I was interrupted by an unexpected guest.”** They explained as Geno sat back on his knees in front of them. **"I was unaware you were expecting a visit from the creator.”** Erratum watched as the confusion on the other’s face rapidly changed to one of alarm.

“I completely forgot! Is it already that time? Ink usually pops in every now and then to give me an update about the multiverse because I can’t attend the meetings! He’s gonna freak out!” Geno panicked briefly, only to pause when the god placed their hand on the top of his head. Geno huffed out an annoyed breath at this.

“I passed a message along with Blue. They are aware of your location and that you are safe.” This reassurance seemed to ease the fear the other had. A look of puzzlement befell his expression a moment later.

“Why didn’t you just tell Ink?”

Erratum wasn’t entirely sure how to answer this question. They didn’t want to confront the creator yet, and they’d prefer to not do it at all considering everything. The struggle to remain neutral and without resentment was a challenge *without* having to be in his presence. **“I do not wish to encounter him.”** Geno tilted their head a bit at this and dislodged the other’s hand.

“Why is that?” Geno questioned, but only received silence in response. He glanced over the Guardian’s face to decipher their schooled expression. “What’s your beef with Ink?”

“We have never met.” Erratum explained with a dismissive wave of their hand. **“There is no ‘beef’ as you would say. Our ideologies do not… agree with each other.”** Seeing the puzzled expression prompted them to attempt to give him at least a small explanation. **“You are aware of the multiverse. Tell me, do you believe that it is a stretch of infinite space?”** This question seemed to throw the other off as he blinked a few times. **“Or would you believe that it is, indeed, finite with limited dimensions?”**

“What does that have to do with it?” Geno questioned, shoulders tensing at the intense expression the other gave him in response.

“Everything.”

Geno would have asked further questions, despite being a bit intimidated, but Erratum suddenly perked up and stared off at the ceiling. They appeared to be listening to something he couldn’t hear, and he chalked it up to one of those god things. **“I need to go. There has been some sort of disturbance nearby that I need to assess.”** They quickly got to their feet and pulled open a new rip to step through. **“I’m not sure when I’ll return, but feel free to continue on as normal.”** They assured him before leaving the plane entirely.

They weren’t expecting to be greeted by a whole bunch of nothing.

Erratum opened their control panel as they stared around the vacant white space. First Geno’s world, now this one? Was this just a style choice the creator ran with for a while? Looking over the details, however, that didn’t seem to be the case at all. It was like there had been a total file erasure somehow, which didn’t make sense to Erratum at all. It shouldn’t be possible for the inhabitants to implode their own universe like this. **“It’s never a simple issue, is it?”** They questioned, to which the screen on their right simply gave a colon and parenthesis in response. This talking to the universe thing was

becoming a bad habit rather quickly.

A series of muttering and shuffling pulled them from their musing. Toward the middle of the white void laid a monster curled up tightly. They hurried over to the distressed monster and knelt at their side. Erratum wasn't sure if they noticed, holding onto the sides of their skull, and mumbling incoherently. Erratum was hesitant but allowed their golden threads to slide past the intricate black and white attire. They withdrew his soul and immediately found a problem with it. Holding onto the soul, they could make out the faint outline of what appeared to be a human hovering around the monster. The soul looked stitched together between two halves of different souls. The entire thing pulsed with pain and conflict between each hemisphere, which appeared to fight for control. Erratum stared up at the image of the human as they opened their control panel. A good override should fix this.

It took quite a bit of maneuvering and creating what they equivalated to a quarantine folder to stash the human away, but eventually, the pulsing of the soul quieted. The image of the human faded away, and the skeleton on the ground fell silent. Erratum quickly returned their soul as they groaned and rolled over onto their back. He stared up at Erratum, seeming both dazed and lethargic. "Chara...?" They muttered.

"They're not available. I've overridden their influence." Erratum watched on with muted confusion as the skeleton sat up abruptly and attempted to scoot away from them.

"No! No overwriting! Please!" They begged of them, to which Erratum held their hands up placatingly.

"Not overwrite, over*ride*. There is a difference between the two." They seemed to relax at this, which heightened Erratum's curiosity more. This obviously had something to do with how he wound up in this state. **"What is it that you go by? Other than Sans."** They

added on after a moment of thought. The skeleton managed to get to his feet with minimal struggles, summoning a glowing weapon and leaning on the handle to stabilize.

“Cross,” He replied as he looked up at the darker skeleton. “Who are you..?”

“Errata is what I’m more commonly known as now. Erratum is also acceptable.” Erratum needed to really find a condensed speech to give for this. **“I am a god, and I heard your prayers. As disorganized as they were...**" This sounded extremely conceded; they should work on that. They watched in confusion as Cross gripped the handle of his blade tighter as he got to one knee. It took them a moment, but Erratum finally understood as they rested their hand on his head. **“There’s no need for that. I answer anyone who needs me. And, looking around, you clearly do.”** They frowned with a glance around the vacant area. Cross looked up at them hopefully at this statement.

“Can you take me away from here? Please… I’ll do anything. I’m a soldier, I can offer you protection.” Cross bargained with them. Erratum tilted their head a bit at the plea. They didn’t really believe they needed any protection. They held their own quite well and far be it from them to drag someone else into their multiverse quarrel.

“Again, not necessary. I can take you into my home and offer you shelter. No one should have to live in these conditions.” They sympathized as they opened a rift behind them again. Cross managed back to his feet after a moment, staring in fascination as he approached it. **“There is another in my realm, just so you are aware. Geno is his name, and I think you’ll both have a lot in common considering your worlds.”** They trained their eyes on a figure in the distance. **“I have more things to do. I will meet you there in a while and answer any questions you have.”** They watched as Cross hesitated for a moment before entering the portal. Erratum sighed as they dispelled it and began their way over to the cloaked individual.

“I suppose this is a rather grave affair.” Erratum watched the cloaked figure turn and peer at them, sockets darkened as they observed them. **“Hello, Death.”**

“I prefer Reaper. A little less grim than death, heh.” Reaper chuckled at his own pun. “I would be curious how you could see me when I’m not actively revealing myself, but I would assume you’re Errata?” He hummed as he looked the other up and down, floating upward a bit more to solve some of the height discrepancies. “I was hoping I’d come across you someday. Your altar is beginning to get crowded with offerings and it’d be grand if you could deal with that.”

“Altar? In Reapertale?”

“Well, yeah. That’s where the altars to all The Guardians are.” Huh.

“I’ll be sure to stop by after I’ve sorted through this situation.” Erratum watched as Reaper collected lingering souls. The cloaked skeleton glanced up after a moment as another dark portal opened.

“Not sticking around for this guy. Good luck.” Reaper disappeared fully soon after that. Erratum turned around as a monster covered in a thick, tar-like liquid stepped through. A singular cyan eye peered into Erratum as a vicious grin overtook their face.

“So, you must be the one who attacked my minion.” He hummed as he looked them up and down. “Dust didn’t mention that you were a god. Forgive my manners.” He spoke as clenched one of his fists and rested it firmly against his chest in respect. “I’d come here to retrieve someone I had intel on, but it appears I was beaten to the punch here.”

“Nightmare,” Erratum spoke with a slight nod of their head. Nightmare watched them curiously as his negative aura drew nothing from the other. In fact, the god’s emotions remained a calm, undisturbed neutral. **“You would be correct. Cross is safe from any otherworldly influences.”** They punctuated this with a sharp glare at the negative spirit. **“I believe your pawn delivered a message to you?”**

“Oh, he did. My question to you is why? You have unfathomable power; I can feel it coming off you in waves.” Nightmare grinned viciously as inky tendrils flicked and writhed behind him. “I am a god in my own right. We could be unstoppable if you joined my side.” One of those tendrils shot out and grasped onto Erratum’s wrist. “Don’t be a martyr. They won’t appreciate you for it. They won’t love you for it.” He watched as the god remained unmoved, only looking at the appendage currently wrapped around their wrist. Erratum moved their opposite hand to grasp onto the tendril firmly. They watched with fascination as it seemed to shrivel and melt away. Nightmare jerked himself backward as if he were burned, staring at the puddle of liquid negativity pooling on the floor.

“You are no god.” Erratum spoke firmly as they watched the other rear up the rest of those tendrils in hostility. **“A real god doesn’t do their job for the glory or to reap benefits. Love, admiration, appreciation… these are all intangible things I don’t ask for. Humility would do you well if you ever wish to be a ruler.”** They were aware they were provoking the darker spirit, but they were also certain he wouldn’t attack alone. Nightmare was intelligent both in battle strategy and in terms of book smarts. He would send people to fight for him, or at the very least fight with an advantage in numbers.

“Don’t say I didn’t warn you.” Nightmare turned to open his own portal, glancing back momentarily. “You’ll see it from my perspective one day. I’ll be waiting for that. Until then, we’re enemies. The next time we meet will be in battle, Guardian.”

“Errata.”

“Of course.” Nightmare chuckled darkly as he slunk backward through the portal again before it disappeared. Erratum released the breath they had been holding and relaxed their posture a bit.

“It will be a cold day before I become that desperate.”

Chapter 7: Altars and Hunger

Chapter Summary

> Erratum arrives in Reapertale to collect whatever offerings have been piling up in their world. After an interesting conversation with Reaper and a futile attempt to sort through emotional baggage, Erratum returns to a world they had been avoiding for a while.

Chapter Notes

> Got all my finals done, aced them all. Hell yeah. Two months until I have my degree.
>
> Anyhow, I had fun messing with this chapter. Some joking interactions I wrote turned into full scenes that I am now just running with as canon for this story. Erratum is not your therapist.
>
> Enjoy.

Opening the portal into Reapertale, Erratum got the sneaking feeling that they were beginning to get in over their head. Two mortals, chatting with death, provoking Nightmare; they should probably schedule in a *lot* more time for training and practicing their magic. Erratum pulled up a screen in front of them to make a quick note before dismissing it again as they noticed the embodiment of death approaching.

“Oh good, Nightmare didn’t kill ya.” Reaper observed as they hovered around the monster a moment before retreating again. “Come this way, the temples aren’t too far off from here. Your altar is in the same area.” Erratum didn’t question this as they followed Reaper through a small stretch of forest and up a stream. Following the stream up revealed a stretch of flat land beyond the trees. Several large temples stood tall along the land, facing away from the large drop of the sheer cliff. It appeared that they were located on a mesa, and the location was quite beautiful. Erratum noticed that in the circle of temples laid another fixture of a smaller proportion. They would have thought it

was a statue if not for how it appeared up close.

It was built upon stone, smooth cuts stacked together to form a shrine in the middle of the clearing. A protective canopy-like roof covered the raised platform, held up with similar stone columns. A carved, rather well made if Erratum were vain enough, statue of them depicted kneeling on the ground with their hands clasped together was on the protected platform. Erratum could see that the eyes were made to be closed, and a stream of water running from the corners to the front of its bowed face dripped in a slow rhythm into a bowl below it. As impressive as it all was, so too were the various items on the platform and around the altar itself.

“Yeah, you can see why it’s becoming a problem now.” Oh yeah, Erratum could see all right.

Wrapped boxes, vases of preserved flowers, rocks (they wouldn’t question what people’s idea of sacred or valuable was), and that was just scratching the surface. Around the platform itself was gold, quite a bit of gold. *So much gold.* Erratum felt a little overwhelmed just taking it all in.

“I would apologize but I had no idea this was an issue.” Erratum looked over to Reaper and placed a hand on his shoulder. **“I appreciate you showing me this. I will move all of this into my realm.”** They assured him, but they could tell Reaper wasn’t exactly listening as he stared at the hand grasping his shoulder. He gave a breath of a laugh before looking back up at Erratum.

“Guess you really are a god after all.” Reaper chuckled before bringing a closed fist up to their chest the same way the god had seen Nightmare do. Must be an etiquette thing among gods and spirits. “But yes, moving all this junk would be really helpful.” Erratum nodded in understanding before approaching their shrine. They glanced up and around at the temples surrounding the altar.

“There is one for each.” They remarked at the seven temples around them. **“I am aware a handful of The Guardians shaped this world, so I suppose it shouldn’t be a surprise. I wonder if it is possible to contact them through their respective temples?”** They mused out loud with an expression of contemplation. That could wait, they decided. Erratum turned back to the altar as a wisp of blue briefly flashed in their vision. They could see now that the statue version of the god had a deep blue stretch of fabric around its shoulders. Erratum carefully removed the article and studied it in their hands. It

appeared to be a scarf of some kind, deep blue in colour and soft to the touch. Erratum carefully wrapped it around their neck and felt as if it was always supposed to be there. It felt like a comforting touch to their soul.

"One for each," Reaper nodded as he looked up over the temples. "Destiny, Magic, Karma… All of 'em are here." He glanced back over at Erratum's shrine. "And of course, our new little Order."

"Order?"

"You seem surprised," Reaper noted with curiosity. "You *are* a Guardian, which means you have a domain. So yeah, Order, Balance, you get the idea." He shrugged. Erratum really didn't get it. "The Guardians must really like you." Reaper idly floated beside them. "Not every day a Sans is taken from their world and shaped into a literal god. Seems like a lot of pressure to put on one skeleton."

"You have no idea." That earned a laugh as Erratum opened a portal beneath the altar itself and carefully guided it down beside the tree they normally rested at. They could see Geno sitting up in their hammock with a confused expression. Erratum didn't offer any explanation as they began the work of transferring everything over. Reaper drifted through the open portal, taking it as an invitation to sate his curiosity. He frowned as the grass around him died as he touched down.

"Ah, sorry about that." He apologized as Erratum stared down at the dead grass. The god frowned as they paused their work and opened a task menu. A few absent taps and the grass renewed itself back to life.

Only to die again around the reaper's feet.

Erratum stubbornly continued this cycle until another window popped up with a display of clear irritation. The god rolled their eyes at the petty little "> :(" displayed and swiped it all away with their hand. **"Could you perhaps not exude your touch of death? At least in my world?"** They requested, which earned a strange look from the demigod.

"Yeah, wish I could pal. Not how this works." Reaper shrugged as they floated upward to spare the grass from any more damage. "Kind of my thing, ya know? Being Death and all?"

Erratum was bewildered at this claim. **"You've been like this your entire life?"** At the other's nod, the god quickly approached him.

“This is a power for stubborn or suffering souls. A touch to bring them to their death. This isn’t something that should be active all the time.” They were truly puzzled on why the other seemed to have no idea what they were talking about. **“All right, I have a temporary solution for this.”** They decided as they raised a hand before quickly pausing. **“Right, right, permission. May I see your soul for a second? Just a moment.”**

“Ehhh…”

“I understand the hesitation, but I promise I only aim to help.” It took a few moments of hesitation for Reaper to reluctantly nod. Erratum gave an appreciative smile as strings appeared and slid into the other's chest. Geno was still watching from mere feet away with shock and confusion. Erratum continued to ignore the audience as they opened their task menu again. It didn’t take them long to find this large source of magic and put a temporary block on it. **“There, now touch the grass again. Go on.”** They insisted. Reaper gave them a confused look. “I want you to know this is the strangest thing that I’ve ever done.” He informed the other as they settled back on the ground. They observed the grass as it stayed pressed against his ankles.

“It’s… fine?” Reaper questioned after a moment. He knelt and ran a careful finger over a wild daisy, admiring the soft petals as they didn’t shrivel up. “What did you do?”

“In simple terms, I turned off your power. Focus for a moment and tell me if you can feel an absence within. An area that feels different than before?” Reaper wasn’t quite sure he understood but closed his eyes anyway. After a moment of taking a mental inventory of his body, he did seem to notice a stillness he hadn’t before.

“Actually, yeah. I do.” He looked up to see the satisfied expression on the god’s face.

“Excellent. Focus on it again while I take the block off.” Reaper quickly floated back up to spare the grass again and nodded. Erratum nodded back as they tapped their screen again. Reaper clenched his eyes closed as he focused on that stillness again. He could feel the moment it swirled back to life and pulsed with magic. **“Good, now you’re aware of where it is. Acquaintance yourself with your magic and its flow first, then you can begin to control it. Once you can do that, it should be as simple as flipping a switch off and on.”** Reaper gave a huff of a laugh as he stared back at Erratum

once more.

“You really are something else, you know that?” Erratum gave a small smile at this.

“Yeah so, can we talk about what’s happening here now?” Reaper looked back at Geno, who had climbed out of his hammock to observe the bizarre scene. “What’s with the piles of junk? And is that literally Death?” Geno questioned with unease as their “guest” gave a wicked grin.

“Oh, what’s this? A long-overdue soul I’ve neglected to reap?” Reaper taunted as they moved to circle the other carefully without touching. The anxiety the other gave off amused him greatly. “Relax, I’m just messing with ya. You must be Geno then.” The demigod moved just a bit out of his personal space and gave him a once over. “With an injury like that and a soul that damaged you should have been dead a while ago. You’re an interesting one, aren’t you?” He grinned.

“Bite me.” Geno spat as he put more distance between the two of them.

“I would, but I don’t fancy a mouthful of dust.”

“Enough,” That shut the two of them up rather quickly. **“No fighting in my garden.”** They chastised while messing with their task window. **“I’ve keyed you into my world. You are free to come and go as you please. I would like to see how you progress with what I have shown you.”**

“What?! You can’t just let him waltz in whenever he pleases!” Geno protested as the reaper hovered near him again. He scooted off to the side again as he noticed. “He’s just gonna come mess with me all the time!”

“I’m wounded that you think so little of me.” Reaper certainly didn’t *sound* it, however.

“It isn’t up for debate. Now, both of you play nice. I have someone else I need to find here.” Erratum gave them both a firm glare of warning before heading further into the wooded areas. It didn’t take them long to find Cross sitting with his legs dangling over a small bridge. He stared down into the pond, lazily following the fish with his eyes. He turned his head sharply at the sound of footsteps, only to relax his shoulders from their tense position.

“I was starting to think I imagined you,” Cross commented as Erratum stepped onto the bridge. “Then again, this whole situation might just be one big hallucination.”

“Unlikely,” The god offered as they settled cross-legged beside him. **“As preposterous as the situation is, it is very much real. I couldn’t leave you in that desolate world filled with nothing but emptiness. I wouldn’t be a very good Guardian if I ignored the pleas of the multiverse.”** Cross watched them with visible awe still etched into their features. Erratum did their best to not appear overwhelmed by it. **“Follow me back to my garden. I would like you to meet the other resident here. Perhaps both of you can help me understand these ‘offerings’ as well.”** They frowned as they stood up again. Cross seemed confused but didn’t dare argue as he scrambled up to follow them. By the time they returned to the garden, only Geno was still there, looking flushed and outraged.

“Oh good! Thanks for leaving me with that creep!” Geno complained as they crossed their arms tight to show their displeasure. “He’s gone now, thankfully.” He sighed before noticing the new skeleton beside him. “Oh, good, who’s this now?”

“Cross. His universe was a lot like yours was, except a white void of nothing.” Geno let his arms fall to his sides at this, taking on a more sympathetic look.

“I see…” He muttered as he looked Cross over. “Sorry… didn’t mean to come off as hostile.”

“Don’t worry about it.” Cross shrugged, not phased either way. Erratum nodded in satisfaction before heading over to the altar and sighing. Geno and Cross exchanged looks at this before following out of curiosity. “That’s an impressive shrine you’ve got there.” Cross admired with respect.

“Yes, I had to move it out of Reapertale for disturbing the peace.” Erratum admitted as they gave all the items odd looks. **“I’m… not certain what to do with all of this stuff. I’m not even quite sure what half of it is…”** They sighed as Geno moved to begin sorting things unprompted.

“Well, we should separate everything into piles then. Perishables, gold, messages…” The damaged skeleton rattled off as they began stacking a couple of boxes off to the side. Cross took that as an initiative to begin moving things as well. Erratum shrugged as they

attempted to help in their endeavour to tame this mess. They set all the letters and messages to the side, knowing these required their entire attention at a later time.

“Whoa, you sure get a lot of stuff,” Cross remarked as he stared down at a box of fresh strawberries dipped in chocolate. “You must not have to go anywhere to get food.” He laughed softly.

“Considering I don’t eat, no, I don’t.” Erratum nodded as he looked from Cross to the box. **“You’re more than free to take any of that stuff. I don’t indulge.”** They smirked to themselves at the excited grin the other gave before diving into the box. Oh yeah, they could totally handle caring for two mortals.

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window, it made it easier to make a time system. Around the same time every day, they would all sit down in front of the god's altar and wait for someone to speak. Both monsters took unnecessary blame for the destruction of their worlds. From the outside perspective, it appeared obvious to the god that they had very little impact on it. Of course, that was easy for Erratum to see.

"Yeah… I do know." Geno relented after another moment, remaining silent as Cross offered him a comforting pat on the shoulder. Geno declined the offered square of chocolate that followed and looked back at the grass. "I appreciate what you're trying to do for us, but I think I might be a little too broken for all this."

"Nonsense," Erratum dismissed just as easily. **"There isn't such a thing. Fixing something may not make it appear the way it was before it was broken, but that doesn't mean it is of no value. You decide what that looks like."** The group sat in contemplative silence for a moment before the god leaned their head back against the column and closed their eyes. **"Now, let's compartmentalize and store all these thoughts and feelings for the day. We can reopen this later."** They instructed as they guided them with words. Erratum could appreciate this part of the session.

"Yip!"

The sound was like nails to the inside of their skull at this point. Their eyes snapped open as the cursed white dog sat before them. How it continued to slip in, Erratum had no idea. They needed to reinforce their antivirus protection code. **"You again,"** They remarked with little enthusiasm.

"Oh hey, it's that dog. Cool little dude." Geno grinned at the sight of something familiar. "Used to drive my bro up a wall, heh." He found slight amusement seeing the normally unflappable god visibly irritated at this small canine.

"Whenever you show up, strange things happen. Is this one of those times?" Erratum questioned the dog. The dog gave another loud bark as a swirling vortex appeared, causing the god to sigh in displeasure. **"Must we take the horrible portal? It always spits me out face first."** They realized the futility of bargaining with a dog. Eventually, they got to their feet again and looked back at the perplexed monsters behind them. **"I apparently have something to attend to. Keep compartmentalizing!"** They quickly instructed, causing the two to sit up straight and clench their eyes shut again.

Erratum sighed as they reluctantly pushed their way through the uncomfortably small swirling vortex.

They found themselves flat on their back in the middle of a shallow puddle of water soon after. **"Could have been worse."** They relented as they sat up. It appeared to be a section of Waterfall as far as they could tell. It didn't seem too far off from a typical Waterfall environment, perhaps a bit quiet. They opened their task manager and briefly felt passing anxiety through their soul.

Horrortale.

They had been contemplating what to do with this universe after they first discovered it. It was the place that made them realize the horrors some worlds were put through. The answer to how to help this world was never simple to them. They hadn't even delved too far into the makings of this world other than the famine and core-controlled magical failure. Erratum wondered *why* the creator had this world's magic created through the core. What was it like *before* the core was built? Did certain monsters just die? Were they shunned from society until they dusted in a twisted sense of survival of the fittest? That was a thought process they weren't mentally ready to deal with yet. They finally stood up from the ground and edited their own code from the screen to remove the wet 'debuff' from them. They stood there a moment in thought, ankles still submerged in the shallow puddle. They needed to approach this next part with extreme caution, and they weren't sure how this newly formed plan in their mind was going to go. Surely if humans could domesticate wolves this way, it could work for feral monsters?

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orbit and scraping at the infraorbital foramen.

It was then he noticed a speck of black in the white of the snow in the distance.

For what Horror lacked in magic he made up for through meticulously trained senses. The closer he got, the clearer he could sense them. This monster smelled *clean*, as if they had never known a day of misery or stress in their life. They clearly weren't from this world, that was for sure. His grin split up even further as he recognized the monster from Nightmare and Dust's description of the god they had come across. If he could bag this catch, he would be greatly rewarded. He could potentially work a favour out of his boss's tightly clutched hands. Their hand left their socket and gripped tightly onto his axe in preparation.

"I can sense you there." Horror stiffened from where he stood. How could the other have possibly detected him? He had practically perfected his craft of stalking and hunting. He could slaughter up there with the best of them! Cursing internally, they sidestepped out from the tree line and faced this piece of prey head-on. Up close, Horror could practically *feel* the power pulsing off them. He parted his jaws slightly, tasting the air and scenting the powerful magic. He grinned viciously as a brief thought of what biting directly into that soul would taste like.

Focus. Instant gratification wouldn't cut it here.

"You would be Horror then." Erratum spoke, not seeming to expect an actual answer. **"I assume you already know who I am, considering your allies, if you would call them that."** They brought up their firewall preemptively at the nervous twitching of the axe in their hand. **"This can take a full blaster without so much as cracking. Your axe will do nothing for you here."** A loud CLANG as said weapon struck powerfully to the wall sent a small pulse of power back against Erratum. It almost would have knocked them back a bit if they weren't already well-versed with this ability. **"Now that we've tested this hypothesis, I'll be holding onto that for our conversation."** They remarked as their strings wrapped firmly around the handle and hoisted it up to a sturdy evergreen, where it dangled precariously from a branch.

Horror was beginning to feel like a trapped animal at this point. The other showed no signs of hostility yet, which only further set his nerves on edge. He growled a bit at them, pointing at them before

gesturing to the area around them. The god stared on for a moment, seemingly attempting to decipher the motion. After a moment, the wall dropped as they looked him over with a renewed sadness.

"I see… you don't have the magic to form your voice." Horror glared harshly at this, refusing to acknowledge his weakness. **"And yes, this is your world, and I don't belong here. You're right to be wary of me and I do not fault you for that. I've been here before. I've seen how things are and how… bleak this world is."** It was obvious they were picking words to placate him. Horror refused to be pacified by this prey. **"I know you won't let me help you or your world. You don't trust me. I wouldn't mind working to earn that trust, however."** This piece of game talked too much.

Before Horror could consider resorting to claws and teeth, Erratum opened their task window and retrieved something from their inventory. Horror froze as the god produced a nicely woven wicker basket, the inside of which held various fruits. A sharp pang of hunger made him momentarily dizzy and nauseous, allowing Erratum enough time to approach him and not be immediately attacked. They didn't push their chances, simply setting the basket down and backing off again. Horror glared at them as he recovered but distantly appreciated the gesture. He stared down at the offered food with obvious ravenous hunger, but he refused to let that overtake his commonsense. He grunted as he grabbed an apple, tossing it out to the god.

Erratum caught the projectile fruit with ease, looking confused as Horror stared them down intensely. Perhaps the other was testing them? Seeing if they were attempting to poison him? Erratum felt a passing sting of anguish at the thought. They lifted the apple to their mouth and took a decent bite out of it to prove it wasn't a trap.

Huh, not bad. Perhaps this whole 'food' thing wasn't as overrated as they first thought.

Horror stood there and waited until the other ate the entire thing, and then another several uncomfortable minutes after. It became increasingly clear that nothing was happening, and that the food was, indeed, edible. He stared at Erratum as he crouched in the snow down to the basket, shoving an entire pear into his mouth without breaking eye contact. Erratum wasn't sure if this was an intimidation tactic, but they found it more bizarre than intimidating. He broke eye contact with them soon after, beginning to simply tear into the flesh of the fruits offered ravenously. *Now* they were a little bit more intimidated. They just stood there, awkwardly watching this monster devour food

like it was going out of style.

Unsurprisingly, Horror went through the entire basket in what must have been five minutes. It would be impressive if it weren't already so sad. **"I hope that at least shows I'm not here to harm you or your world. Perhaps one day you'll see that."** Erratum spoke as the other stood from the snow and glanced up to where their axe was dangling. Taking the hint, the god allowed the threads to lower the weapon down until the other could take it. **"I also placed another few baskets directly in your home. I know, but I didn't think it safe to have you carry anything in the open."** They held their hands up as the other immediately bristled at the information. Deciding it wasn't worth the confrontation, Horror backed down and rested his axe over his shoulder.

"…back?"

Erratum perked up a bit at the raspy-sounding voice. It was obviously rough from lack of use, but it also showed the energy the food provided the other. **"Yes, I'll be back. I'll try to bring a variety of things for you to try, and for your brother of course."** They made sure to throw that in there. Call it a little manipulative, but they knew how important most Sanses found their brothers. The other nodded once to show they understood.

"Weird."

"So I've heard." Erratum smiled faintly with a small shrug. **"At any rate, I would rather not stay around for your little group to find us. Wouldn't want them seeing you fraternizing with the enemy."** Horror could tell this wasn't a taunt, but a genuine concern. They were right though. Nightmare would take his head clean off if he found out he not only let the god get away, but also accepted any sort of gift from them. He gave another nod to show he understood as the god opened a window into another world. **"I will be seeing you around then."**

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better than he had in a while. Killer seemed to take note of his lack of reaction, nearly pouting as the other simply walked past him. “Nothing? Really? Come on, I’ve been waiting for like ten minutes! Not even a courtesy stab?” He half whined as the other refused to indulge him. Horror rolled his eyelight and turned to look at the other.

“…Shut up. Get down.”

He then turned and left the stunned monster sitting there as he retired to his room. Killer sat there dumbly for a few beats of silence before slipping back off the table and leaving the kitchen. “Since when the hell could you do that? Have you been giving us the silent treatment for years?!” He called out as the other clicked the lock to his room.

Chapter 8: Round Two

Chapter Summary

Erratum answers the call to action once again to push back violent monsters from another universe. After encountering a bright positive spirit, they realize that the multiverse's balances are more precariously kept than they first believed.

Chapter Notes

Hello again, yes this is being posted earlier than normal. I'm extremely sick and on my week break before beginning my last stretch of nursing school. I write to cope anymore.
Anyhow! This chapter is nothing at all like what I had planned it to be but we're just gonna go with it. Erratum decided they needed to do a lot of talking and exposition the crap out of innocent monsters.

Enjoy.

“He better have been tellin’ the truth. I feel so stupid doing this but dammit, I got nobody else to call.”

The ground rumbled with the impact of magic that shook snow loose from trees. Red cringed as he stayed crouched over their wounded brother. The attack happened so suddenly he was caught off guard being “escorted” to his guard post. His phone had been crushed in the scuffle and he had no way of contacting anyone else for assistance with these assailants.

“What’s it again… Errata, yeah that’s it. Look we’re gonna die out here, it ain’t lookin’ good. I can’t take them both down and keep my bro safe at the same time. Dammit, *please* I’m beggin’ ya, and I don’t beg for nothing!” Red swore as he watched the remaining dog guards poof into dust with just a few vicious slices. “Shit-!” Red felt panic choking him as empty sockets leaking black tar locked onto him.

“Listen to you, it’s hilarious. Crying and begging for someone to come and help you. And here I thought the Fell universes were supposed to

be tough and ruthless." Killer cackled as he mocked and intimidated the wounded skeleton. "Well, tell me then," He grinned as a flurry of knives circled his hand a moment before launching forward. "Where's your god now?!" Red could only watch as his fight or flight skills decided to lock firmly into a standstill in between. The blades suddenly slammed into a transparent wall of static and binary numbers. The shockwave of the impact knocked Red back on top of his brother, but he remained unharmed from the attack.

"They're right here."

Red whipped his head to the side at the ethereal voice above him. "I'll be damned…" He breathed as the darker god stared down at him a moment, most likely to view the damage done.

"I would have been here sooner, but I was attempting to keep my…" Erratum trailed their eyes over to Cross, standing posed beside them with their glowing blade wielded in their hands. **"…guard, from following. I was not successful."**

"You're not going into any battle without me." Cross stated matter-of-factly without taking his eyes off the enemies. Killer sneered at the two of them but was unable to get a word out as Dust shoved him to the side with a fierce snarl.

"Oh, I was *hoping* to see your face again. We've got some unfinished business." Dust growled as Erratum kept their eyes firmly trained on Dust now. They knew they had to watch his every move to keep themselves safe, but they also needed to address the two native brothers as well.

"I can open a doorway to my world for the two of you. It will keep you safe until-"

"To hell with that!" Erratum frowned as Red cut them off immediately. They had hoped with their injuries they would retreat without hesitation, but it was clear that wasn't going to happen. "We got the numbers now, ain't no way we're ducking out." He declared as their taller brother recovered to his feet. "We'll show 'em how Fell monsters fight!"

"This is all very cute and touching, but less chatter, more splatter!" Killer cut in with another series of magical knives flinging through the air. Cross reacted instantaneously by positioning himself closer to Erratum and deflecting the blades with his much larger one. "I don't mean to question your judgment, but at this rate, it's not going to be

helpful to argue with them," Cross informed them with a flourish of their blade.

"Very well but stay out of close combat. That is where they want you to be, and we could use the backup from the rear." Erratum ordered the two scraped-up brothers. Red was smart enough to know when to pick his arguments and this was not one of them. He nodded sharply, more than comfortable staying long-range and focusing on magical attacks. He was a little worried about Papyrus following the same instructions, but it appeared that he viewed the god as a commander in this situation. They both fell back further while Erratum further approached.

"Can't wait to see the look on Boss's face when we bring back your dust in a jar." Killer grinned as they flipped their knife in their hand. "Maybe he'll get off your ass for your last failure, Dusty." His jeering seemed to cross all boundaries, teammates, or enemies. Dust glowered briefly at him before surrounding himself with blasters. "Okay, okay, I get it. Less banter." Killer grumbled as they launched themselves forward while blasts of magic shot around him.

Erratum was quick to dodge the incoming attack, leaving Cross to expertly parry the melee knife attack. "Ohhh, I recognize you. Boss was real disappointed to see you sided against him." Killer grinned viciously as they teleported out of the striking zone of his glowing blade. "I can see you're no fun, too serious. You're hardly a loss." They quipped with a toss of another knife. Cross didn't bother to retort back to any of his provocations and focused on returning blows. Leaning to the left allowed the knife to land home in a tree, allowing Cross to grasp it and return it back to sender. Killer winced as it grazed past his cheek, eyes narrowing with renewed rage as they wiped the cut with their jacket sleeve.

While Cross focused on the close combat, Erratum was left to block and evade powerful blasts and sharp projectiles. After taking brief cover behind a large evergreen, they decided now was a perfect time to execute some newer attacks. They took a calming breath before leaning their body out from behind their protective cover. Their task menu screens circled around them briefly before a smaller one descended over one socket. The crosshair helped Erratum to accurately target the murderous skeleton before slamming their hand onto their screen to execute their command. A condensed beam of pure data and electricity shot forth from the screen and hurdled toward Dust. The skeleton had little time to react to the surprise attack, convulsing as it slammed straight into their chest. A strangled

cry tore from his throat as the force knocked him several feet back while the static burned and seared their very bones. He felt like his spine was wrapped in livewires as he pushed himself onto his stomach, desperately hoping the cold bite of snow would numb it. He weakly raised an arm and shot off a blaster, which immediately collided beams from a returned blaster.

“Not lookin’ so hot now, are ya?” Red sneered from behind Erratum as his own blasters hovered at the ready for further commands.

Dust wasn’t an idiot, in fact, he prided himself on retaining a great wealth of intelligence through his insanity. This wasn’t going to end in their favour; he had known that from the moment that damn god appeared. Still, if they could handicap them in some way, then maybe this wasn’t all for naught. He locked his eyes onto Erratum, seeing them tapping away on the transparent screen in front of them. If he couldn’t land a hit on the monsters around them, maybe he could destroy whatever power they were using to create their attacks. They redirected their blast to fire directly at the console screen. Erratum looked up at the sound of the blast, the screen in front of them expanding as it took the brunt of the attack. Rather than shatter the screen or blow Erratum back, the beam itself seemed to almost absorb into the console. Erratum looked on with fascination as lines and lines of code appeared on their screen.

Oh, this was an interesting new development.

The god locked their eyes on the code before trailing their hand down to a displayed command just below it. Download. This was about to get interesting.

They pressed down onto it, watching as the code transferred off to the side of them in glitching lines of binary. Slowly but surely, it loaded into a familiar floating blaster after a few moments of reconstructing the data. **“For someone who wishes to see me fail, you certainly help me discover new ways to prosper.”** Erratum commented before raising their hand up in command. The blaster shot off without hesitation, bringing an exciting satisfaction to Erratum’s soul. If they could virtually steal their enemies’ attacks, then they had a greater advantage against them. Dust managed to crawl their way out of the blast radius, cursing violently at how their advantage had turned into a massive disadvantage.

“Way to go, Dusty!” Killer snarled as they were all but wrestling with Cross now on the ground, both having been disarmed sometime

within their struggle. “ *Really* knocking it out of the park lately!”

“SHUT UP! Both of you!” Dust snarled as he whipped his head around to something unseen. “I’m not *weak*, they’re a god! I’m not useless!” They snapped defensively to their air around them. Erratum had the time to feel a ping of pity for the obviously unstable monster. A shout of anguish drew them out of it, however, as they turned their attention to the other fighting monsters. Killer had managed to withdraw another hidden blade and pierced it into Cross’s shoulder. Erratum reacted instantaneously as their strings shot out from their hand. This monster’s soul hovered in front of their body, ironically a perfect target shape that made snatching it easy. Killer gave a wheeze of a breath as a burning sensation filled their soul as they were lifted and dragged away from the fight.

Underneath the pain of the strings another burning sensation built up inside him.

Erratum looked up sharply as a newer golden portal split the sky in half. Another skeleton monster appeared from within it, bow at the ready and already firing off in retaliation. Dust hissed as they decided to take their loss and retreat, quickly vanishing from the clearing. Dream landed a few meters away from the battle, arm still drawn back on their bow at the ready.

“What did you do to me?! What have you done?!” Erratum turned their head sharply at the wail of their currently captive monster. Killer was clawing at their chest, his soul still tangled in their strings. The circular soul was contorting and warping its shape, looking oblong and quivering as if in a personal struggle. They quickly retracted their strings; afraid they might accidentally destabilize and shatter the soul if not. The monster continued to gasp and grip onto their ribs tightly. “Damn you! No, no not now… Fuck!” They cursed sharply as they fell back into a black hole of a portal behind them. The clearing was once again quiet, save for the desperate panting and groans of the remaining monsters.

“Don’t worry about me. I’ve been stabbed in way worse places.” Cross gave a strained chuckle as he gripped the hilt of the blade. The newly appeared spirit quickly rushed toward him, however, grasping onto his wrist as he knelt beside him. Cross blinked up at him, having not previously seen him in the fray.

“Wait! Um, let me do it.” Dream insisted as he grasped onto the handle carefully. “I can heal you during it, so it won’t be as bad.”

They explained as their opposite hand glowed a soft yellow and rested on his shoulder. Cross grunted a bit as the knife was removed, but the sting was quickly soothed. “There… is that better?”

“Yeah… thank you, uh..?”

“Dream! My name is Dream.” The spirit quickly answered the unspoken question with a smile.

“Cross.” The other offered back.

“I sensed a large spike of negativity here, even for a place like Underfell.” He explained as they both rose to their feet. “I knew this had to have been the work of my brother and his cohorts.” He turned as Erratum approached and gasped softly. He quickly raised his fist and pressed it to his chest, to which the god stared on with equal confusion. “It’s… a show of respect. From lower-tier deities.” He explained, to which the other opened their mouth in a silent “ah” of understanding.

“That answers a lot of questions.” They glanced up as Red and his brother joined them. **“I am glad you are unharmed. Things should resume as normal during the next cycle.”** Erratum assured, keeping it vague for Red’s brother’s sake.

“Good to hear it.” Red sighed before glancing up at the god. “Sheesh, Blue wasn’t lying. You’re tall as shit.” He remarked, causing Dream to jolt in offense for the god.

“Ah, you *really* shouldn’t use such language with a god. Swears are… extremely offensive, more so than just to any other monster.” Dream stammered out anxiously.

“I take no offense. I understand mannerisms are different in each universe.” Erratum assured, much to Dream’s immediate relief.

“I’ve never seen you around before all of this… how long have you been here? You know… in the multiverse?” Dream questioned with genuine interest. It wasn’t every day you got to speak to a Guardian, after all.

“Well… I suppose shortly after the shaping of the creator. A stretch of time after Undertale first formed.” They explained to the group of interested monsters. **“Of course I was not a Guardian at that time. It was not long after-“** They paused, considering this answer. There was no sense in attempting to spare the other’s feelings,

however. **“After the fall of Dreamtale I was made into what I am now.”** They didn’t miss the small cringe from Dream. **“I apologize for bringing it up.”**

“No no, I asked.” Dream assured as he wrung his hands together. “It’s just… hard to think about.” He explained to which Erratum nodded in understanding.

“My own world was destroyed and wiped from existence when I was removed from it. I can empathize with your pain, even if I have long since forgotten the faces of my friends and family.”

Dream gave them a pitying expression at this. “That’s terrible… I’m sorry you had to go through all of that. But! Now you’re here helping so many people!” He immediately brightened up with his positivity. Erratum felt the waves of his aura battering against their person, trying to influence their emotions. They weren’t convinced the other was aware he was doing it. “You should really consider-“

“Your group and your council, while fascinating, aren’t for me. I would have many conflicts with varying ideas and morals, I’m certain.” Dream was visibly confused and surprised by the answer.

“But… your input would be so important!”

“Be that as it may, I will continue to work from a distance.” They were unrelenting at this. The last thing they needed was a power struggle in the form of a democratic gathering. **“I must be going. I’m afraid we might have left Geno in a bit of tizzy, leaving him alone with Reaper.”**

“Reaper??”

“He’s pretty good company all things considered.” Cross commented with a small grin. “Between the subtle threats of death and sarcasm, of course.” Dream took a step back and simply *observed* these bizarre new monsters. He gave a delighted laugh after a few moments, the sound tinkling out like gentle bells.

“It sure was a pleasure to meet the both of you! I really do hope we can talk again sometime.” Dream blinked as he moved to fish out his phone after a moment. “Oh! Here, in case you ever need to contact me, let me give you my number. And maybe in case I ever have any questions for you too.” He flushed in slight embarrassment.

“What is that.”

“A…phone?” Dream blinked as the other continued to stare at him with confusion. “We use it to contact other monsters on their own phones. Do you… have you never…?”

“Geeze Errata,” Cross sighed as he crossed his arms. “You really need to invest more time in learning about our ‘mortal’ ways.” He air quoted the word “mortal” as he did so. “You’re so out of touch.”

“I am doing my best!” Erratum defended with a small frown. They ignored the monochrome guard as they took the phone from Dream’s hand and turned it over a few times. **“Do you think you can make this work?”** They questioned, to which a screen popped up with a thumbs up. Erratum touched the device to their screen and watched as the numbers encoded onto their display. **“That should work the same way. This is much easier for me.”** They explained as they handed Dream’s phone back to him.

“What is that?” Dream questioned as he went to pocket his phone again, missing his pocket a few times as he gawked.

“The multiverse.”

“I beg your damn pardon?” Red deadpanned.

“Um… I also?” Dream spoke with confusion.

“The multiverse is a living, sentient being. The Guardians imbibed it with all their magic and intent, so of course, it is conscious. It is such a complex being, however, that communication is beyond comprehension to even the most literate of deities. It manipulates itself to appear as coding to me, working as a complex computer or machine to communicate and follow my influence.”

“Fascinating,” Dream breathed in wonder. “So, what does that make you a Guardian of?”

“Balance, apparently.” Erratum shrugged in response. **“Order, keeping things from tilting too far in one direction. There are several balances in this multiverse, I’m sure you’re familiar with one at least. Positivity and negativity are one of them. One cannot supersede the other, and one cannot survive without the other.”** They scanned the spirit’s face as they said this, frown beginning to set firm on their face as they did so.

“Oh Guardians above he never explained your job to you.”

“What??”

Erratum pressed their hands together and raised them to their face, taking a slow deep breath to keep it together. Of course. Of *course* the creator forgot to explain the balance to him. Erratum wondered silently if they were put here solely to fix every single mess that had ever been made in this multiverse. It was certainly beginning to feel like it.

“You are the embodiment of positivity. You keep those emotions alive in this plane. Your brother is the embodiment of negativity, same concept. You both live on a scale.” They explained slowly, as though teaching it to a child. **“Too much positivity and things begin to shift. Too much negativity, the same thing. You are both meant to balance each other out so the multiverse runs on a smooth course of experiencing life through proper emotional channels.”**

“So… eliminating negativity-“

“Would be *catastrophic.*” Erratum quickly interjected with a wide-eyed expression. **“The whole system would implode on itself!”**

“I’m not saying we should do that! Just a question!” Dream held his hands up defensively at this. “Just… is it so bad to have an excess of positivity over negativity?” He questioned. “I honestly don’t see how that can be bad.”

“It sounds nice, yes. Until positivity supersedes and begins to bleed and mix into negativity.” Erratum spoke sharply. **“Delight from cruel acts, happiness at others' expense… you can see how positive emotions are not always for good intentions.”**

“I-” Dream stuttered as he attempted to wrap his mind around it. “I…I guess not. I mean… sure some people feel good about doing bad things but… is that positivity?” He questioned, beginning to feel a sense of doubt. Was this monster telling him the truth? Did he have a way bigger task than he originally thought?

“You put the definition of positivity into a very narrow box. Contemplate on this conversation, and perhaps speak to the creator and see what he tells you.” Golden strings pulled back reality, allowing Cross to step through the portal and hold his hand out for Erratum. **“Think for yourself, Dream.”** They left him with that as they disappeared back into their own world.

"*Nightmare!"*

The negative spirit jolted in their chair, book tumbling from their hands as Killer shoved the doors to his study open so hard they smacked against the wall. His slimy appendages immediately reared up in hostility at the interruption, but the spirit became aware of the strong emotions coming from the other.

That should not be happening. Killer's emotions were dulled and repressed from the mutation of a soul he had.

Killer stumbled before falling to his hands and knees, grasping onto the edge of Nightmare's jacket desperately. "They… they did something..! My soul..!" He wheezed out in a panic.

"Get off the floor! I can't understand you when you're in hysterics." Nightmare growled as he yanked his jacket free from his hand. Killer stumbled back onto his feet, and Nightmare's appendages shot up in alarm. The normally perfectly round soul on his chest was quivering and attempting to shape itself.

"That damn god… they grabbed it with these golden strings… and it burns! It hurts!" Killer gasped as they clutched the front of their shirt. "Make it stop!"

Nightmare could *not* allow the soul to take back its original shape. Not after all the work he had done to keep the murderous monster under his control. One appendage shot out and grasped onto the soul, curling, and shaping it back down into a perfect circle. A few pulses of negative intent and the target of a soul grew still and reverted back to normal. Killer sighed out shakily in relief as it was returned to its proper place. "Thank you… thank you…" He babbled and praised the dark being while Nightmare sat back again and thought. Another failure to stretch his control due to this god's interference and it appeared they were becoming a bigger threat with each day that passed. He needed to begin strategizing how to take them down for

good.

Erratum shifted a bit on the uncomfortable pile of shredded blankets and gutted pillows they were half sitting, half lounging on. It wasn't ideal, but far be it from them to tell the hungry monster how he should live his life. Said monster was sitting across from them, large red eye staring almost directly into their soul. Erratum had grown less uneasy through their encounters, but it was still an eerie sight.

"Boss said… wrecked their mission." Horror spoke in broken sentences still, but the progress of building magic reserves was obvious in the presence of his voice. Erratum nodded their head at this, not denying it.

"It was senseless slaughter. I heard a prayer, I responded. Their problems become mine by proxy." Erratum explained as Horror munched idly on a plate of cookies the god had found at their altar. **"It is the same way I would respond to your prayer if called upon. I suppose I am morally gray in that aspect, but I almost must be considering my position."** Horror nodded their head slowly at this, showing he understood what they meant.

"God… have to… nonbiased."

"That's pretty much it." Erratum agreed with the offered broken response. **"I would be remiss to pick and choose who deserves help. Certainly, I can deny sadistic wants and vain demands, but I will always answer those who truly need me. It doesn't matter the walk of life."**

"Still weird…" Erratum breathed out a soft laugh at this. Horror was quiet after this, focusing on cleaning his plate. The house they lived in was rickety and had seen better days, but it offered a semblance of protection for them. Erratum supposed it was a sign of trust to be allowed inside at all. "Nightmare."

"Spirit of negativity." Erratum nodded, encouraging him to continue.

“Would answer…? Despite everything?”

Erratum took a pause at this as the other watched them intently. This felt like a test, and the wrong answer would earn them distrust. They stuck with the truth, regardless. **“If he truly needed me, in a way that wasn’t for his own personal gain or to cause suffering of others, yes. Nightmare is still a person and is also needed for the balance of emotions.”** They replied as they looked down at their own hands. **“This world… the people in it… they need each of the balances to live. The balances are what keep everything alive, keeps the multiverse from destruction. You are all at their mercy, and the more the balance is tipped, the less merciful it becomes.”**

Horror let the silence continue after this, leaving Erratum to wonder what the other was thinking. It was hard to judge based on his expression since he remained rather guarded in all aspects. Erratum simply continued to look at their hands, contemplating all the things they had done with them. All the monsters they had helped and all the actions they had taken, whether they were the right ones or not. They blinked as a cookie was settled into their hand, causing their head to raise again. Horror sat across from them, closer than before, and offered them a rare, less frightening grin.

“Like our odds… with you. Keep… keep us protected. Multiverse is… in safe hands.” It was the clearest the other had spoken the entire time. He still needed time to think and pull them together, but his sentences were becoming more structured and understandable. Erratum smiled back at the recovering monster.

“That means a lot, coming from you.” They jolted as Horror grabbed onto them and partially dragged them forward, alarming them briefly. They were confused as the other continued to hold onto them and didn’t let go. **“Um… what is this? That you’re doing?”** Horror pulled back slightly to look at their face and frowned.

“Hug?”

“What is ‘hug’?” They questioned, which only earned a pathetic whimper and them being smooshed back into his chest once more.

Chapter 9: Group therapy and rising tensions

Chapter Summary

After returning from Horrortale, and receiving a (totally not worried) lecture from Geno, Cross lets on the two of them know more than the god thought about their personal plights. After a long-winded venting session, and a rather touching moment, Erratum is ready to answer more calls. They thought.

Chapter Notes

Once again, super early chapter. I wanted to get something out there since nursing school started back up today and it's going to be a MESS since it's my last semester. I'm talkin' 132 hours of practicums at a hospital, overnight shifts, on a cardiac unit. It's gonna suck :D

Anyhow! I had meant for this to be straight tension and solely moving things forward, but the first half turned into... well, cute stuff? I think it's cute, at least one scene. Erratum expositions the hell out of their subjects once more.

Enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Would it kill you to give a heads up whenever you’re gonna disappear for a while?” Erratum had just been returning from Horrortale when Geno confronted them with his arms crossed. The god had to admit that they did have a bad habit of disappearing within a moment’s notice. They forgot that with two others living in their world, it was probably polite to let them know when they’d be gone for a bit.

“I didn’t mean to worry you. I had an appointment in Horrortale.”

“I wasn’t *worried* about you!” Geno quickly defended with a scowl. “Would just be nice to know, okay?” He frowned after a moment before uncrossing his arms. “Wait, Horrortale? What in the world

could you have to do in there??" He certainly *seemed* worried, which amused the god greatly, though they didn't openly show it.

"I visit a friend there every so often, bring food. You understand how that world is." Erratum explained while Geno relented a bit at this. **"Horror is a little boisterous for sure, but he is a gentle soul no less. Circumstances have made him this way."**

"*Horror?!*"

Geno was staring at the god as though they had completely lost their mind. "That's what you consider a friend?? He's one of Nightmare's, ya know?" He reminded them as his hands moved around as he spoke. "Last I remember you telling me, you and he aren't on the best terms. What makes you think Horror won't set up an ambush on you one day?" Geno grunted as Erratum rested their hand on top of his head.

"You *are* worried." Erratum remarked with audible amusement now, unable to help themselves. Geno batted their hand away with a frustrated sound, turning his head back as Cross approached.

"There you guys are. Reaper's dropped by so I figured you'd want to know." Cross informed, to which Erratum nodded and Geno jolted noticeably.

"He's here?!" Geno sputtered with anxiety, yanking the bottom of his hoodie and sweating.

"Better get going if you want to get yourself mentally prepared." Cross snickered as Geno rushed off where the other had come from. Erratum moved to do the same, only to be stopped as Cross held his arm out.

"He's not really here, just figured you needed a break." Cross shrugged before laughing a bit. "For someone who claims he can't stand the guy, he sure has an interesting reaction to him." He commented with a knowing smirk. "Methinks he protest too much."

"Don't go telling him that or you'll become a pincushion full of bones." Erratum advised with a slight smile.

"So… Horrortale." Cross prompted with curiosity. Erratum understood his curiosities; he hadn't had any contact with other realities before Erratum came around.

"Let me see if I can make this a little simpler." Erratum pulled up their task menu and scrolled through it a moment. **"Ah… here we**

are." They slid the screen over to Cross so he could read it himself. The guard seemed startled by this, gently running a hand over the screen with interest. It didn't appear to react to his touch like it did Erratum, but he wasn't a god after all.

"How exactly does this work? Does this document everything that's happened in that universe?" He questioned as he skimmed the words on the screen.

"More or less. It's the direct fabric of their reality being processed into code, which is then being displayed onto my screens for viewing."

"That's extremely convoluted and confusing."

"I've found that's what being a god is all about."

Cross took a solid few minutes to read through everything, grimacing as he looked back at Erratum. "Wow… that's really messed up. Like… *really* messed up." He muttered as he glanced back at the screen. "Are there a lot of worlds like this...?"

"There are quite a few I've come across in my time. They aren't always the same, and they all vary in degrees of horror. My worry is how many more worlds like these will be created." Erratum frowned as they idly weaved their golden threads between their fingers to ease their rising frustration.

"Is that why you don't like Ink?"

Erratum abruptly stopped their hand movements at the question, eyes locking onto the guard. Cross scanned over their face to try and decipher the god's thoughts. "It's just something me and Geno have talked about. The way you said that though," He commented as he passed the screen back over to them. "The way you say, 'how many of those kinds of worlds will be created', it sounds personal. It's about Ink creating these terrible worlds, isn't it?" Erratum remained silent at this.

"Gotcha," Cross seemed rather satisfied with himself at this. "Looks like we finally have something for *you* to talk about during our little group huddle." Erratum wasn't sure how to respond but was thankfully saved from having this conversation as their robe pocket wriggled.

"Hoi!"

Erratum frowned as a small head poked out from their pocket, staring up at them with beady eyes. “Awawawa… so tol!" Temmie spoke in a weak voice. Cross pointed at the creature with a confused expression.

“Is that a Temmie in your pocket?” Cross questioned the obvious as Erratum grabbed the thing by the scruff and lifted it to examine.

The creature was obviously a stowaway from Horrortale, the condition of them gave that away immediately. They must have snuck in at some point when they were tracking Horror down. They were obviously suffering from mange and had several active skin infections from the looks of it.

“I’m not sure how you managed to get here without me detecting it.” Erratum spoke with curiosity. **“I must also make a note that anyone I’m carrying on me, apparently, can just slip through my wards.”**

“P!! Don’t send Tem back!!” The creature wailed as they hung loosely from the god’s grasp. “Tems… EAT Tem! Tem weak… they die!” They pleaded with them.

“Aw, c’mon, you can’t toss them out.” Cross agreed as he looked on with equal pity. “You’re all for a good sob story anyway, right?”

Erratum gave him a withering look as they moved to properly cup the monster in their hands. **“I wouldn’t send them back in this condition anyway.”** They reassured both parties. **“You’re free to stay as long as you need.”** They were slightly amused that both Cross and Temmie slumped with relief at this.

“You so kind! Tem …preciate!” The small monster sniffled. Erratum handed the creature off to Cross.

“Your responsibility then, since you vouched for them.” They informed the guard as he handled the Temmie. **“Give it a bath first.”**

“Nooo! Not bath!!”

Cross held the Temmie away from his body as it wriggled and protested. “Yeah… I’ll get right on that…” He sighed with reluctance.

“Hey, Errata…”

“We are compartmentalizing.”

“Yeah, yeah, whatever. You’re skipping out on your turn.” Erratum sighed as they opened their eyes again to view the group. Cross was sitting beside Geno, who was sitting a significant distance away from Reaper, who had decided to more view than participate. Erratum had allowed him to stay when he dropped in during their daily sessions of… whatever this was.

“There is nothing for me to discuss.” They assured as they attempted to go back to their meditations. They knew where this was going.

“Yeah, I don’t think so,” Geno remarked, Temmie settled in his lap as he patted their head. “We *gotta* talk about your beef with Ink.” He spoke, which immediately caught Reaper’s attention.

“Oh? What’s he done to you that’s gotten under *your* skin? You seem rather unflappable.” Reaper questioned with both amusement and curiosity.

“Again, there is no ‘beef’ to be had. We haven’t even met before.” Erratum reminded as they ran a hand over their face. **“Our ideals clash.”**

“What ideals?” Geno prodded further. “We’re not gonna settle for that answer anymore. Even if you portal your way out of here, you still have to come back sometime! And we’ll keep bugging you!” He threatened, and Erratum knew he was one hundred percent serious. They let out a long-suffering groan and slumped back against their altar.

“…Have I ever told the story of how I became a Guardian?”

“You know you haven’t, quit stalling.”

Erratum frowned as they pulled out a pair of knitting needles and resettled themselves in a proper sitting position. Their golden strings wrapped firmly to the needles as they began to knit; it always eased a bit of their anxiety. **“I don’t quite remember where I came from or**

the universe that I was in. Destiny had created it on their own. I was somewhat of a prized possession, I would consider. Not much of a person, but an idea that they appreciated."

"Destiny, okay. That's one of the Seven that you talked about, right?" Cross checked as he tried to recall the long, dull lecture-style talk Erratum had given them.

"That's correct," The god nodded as the needles clacked together softly. **"Fate had created their own… world? Well, it was more of an endless white void, where they made their own divine being."**

"That was Ink," Geno concluded from the way the others face subtly shifted.

"Yes," They confirmed once more. **"Destiny was careful with their work. They took what would translate to years crafting me and my world. Fate? You could equivalate their shaping of Ink to a few days, a week at most."** They pulled at a loose thread, breaking it off with a dissatisfied expression. **"When you work that quickly, you tend to miss a few steps and make a few mistakes."**

"What are you implying?"

Erratum glanced up at Reaper, noting the tone of his voice that clearly screamed 'choose your words carefully' at them. **"There is no implication to be made. The quick crafting is why he possesses no soul."** They reminded the demigod. Said demigod stiffened up as their dark wings summoned and fluffed out.

"He what?!" Geno sputtered as he lurched forward, knocking Temmie out of their lap. "What do you *mean* he has no soul?!"

"I'm sorry I… thought you would be aware of this." Erratum was genuinely shocked at this. Did *anyone* know about the creator's… condition? **"Has he never told you any of this?"**

"Uhhh, no. No, it's never come up in conversation before." Reaper spoke as he held one wing in front of himself, attempting to groom the feathers back into place.

"But… why else do you think he carries his paints to simulate emotions?"

"*That's* what that's for?!" Geno was floored by how casually the other was making this conversation. They could make the apocalypse sound

like a regular Tuesday afternoon.

“I thought it was just a weird quirk. Or an addiction. You know how Sanses are with their condiments.” Reaper shrugged with a frown. “So… no soul, no emotions. Wow… that’s kind of a bombshell.” He admitted. Erratum felt a tiny bit bad dropping all of that on them.

“What does this have to do with your creation though?” Cross questioned as he watched the god intently.

Erratum moved their fingers quicker as they considered how to word their answer. **“His soul was unstable when he was made due to the influx of power. It was introduced too much too soon, and it essentially crumbled away. He was gifted with the ability to create, so that was the tradeoff I suppose. He was also given guidelines and warnings about the multiverse and his powers. The thing about not having a soul is that you lack a sense of being as well. Empathy, rationality, impulse control, even memories.”** They exhaled with frustration. **“So, when they were told that the multiverse could only hold so much, they didn’t retain it. Thus, he never learned to show restraint or limit what he makes. The multiverse continues to fill at an accelerated rate, and if it becomes overcrowded, well…”**

“Bad things… got it.” Geno nodded as the other trailed off. “You put too much air in a balloon, it’s eventually gonna pop.”

“A proper analogy for it, I suppose. Worlds colliding, balances flipping, the inevitable end to the entire multiverse.”

There was that casual apocalypse conversation Geno noted with a grim sense of humor.

“So, I was taken from my world by Fate, and my universe collapsed. I was… supposed to be his counterpart. A demigod with the ability to destroy and erase worlds from existence. I was meant to counteract and cull universes to make room.” The silence that followed was deafening. They sat there, uncomfortable for a moment.

“You don’t do that though.”

“I don’t. I could, but that Destiny never came to be.” They explained. **“Destiny tried to take me back from Fate’s hand. The back and forth was… agonizing.”** They had never spoken about the experience before now. **“Mortals were never meant to be subjected**

to their touches for a prolonged period. Their magic and auras are potent, and it sears your very being. That much should be obvious by the state of my bones."

"Wait… all of that… they're scorched??" Geno gaped as he looked over the blackened bones.

"In a sense of the word. Eventually, Karma stepped in and took me away. They brought me here, to the anti-void, the same place the creator was formed." They looked around at the dense garden they had made of the area. The void stretched on endlessly, as far as they could tell. **"By then, all their magic and intent had altered my being, the very makeup of my soul. And thus, Errata was born, so to say."**

The group of skeletons exchanged looks with one another as they soaked all of this in. Cross was the first to speak after the tense quiet.

"I uh… I'm sorry. We shouldn't have pushed you into sharing such a personal story."

"You were bound to learn of it eventually. I have no shame in where I've come from or where I've been. I've made peace with my life and the loss of my previous one."

"You're a hell of a lot stronger than me then." Geno chuckled bitterly at this.

"Me too." Cross agreed softly as he looked to the grass under him. Temmie had found the discarded golden string in the grass and was idly batting it, oblivious to the seriousness of the conversation.

"Yikes… and I thought I could kill a mood." Reaper joked, earning a glare from Geno at the poor timing.

Erratum frowned as agony pulsed through their soul as the two sat before them with haunted looks. They stood from their altar and walked the short distance to them before settling down on their knees. Both skeletons looked up at them as they rested a hand on the backs of their necks and pulled them in. Geno and Cross both jolted in surprise as they were pressed into the god's chest and crowded together.

"What…??" Geno sputtered in confusion as they tried to look up at Erratum. The god was unbudging, however, as they kept them held close.

“You may not have recovered from the pain of losing your homes,” Erratum murmured to them softly as they held them tighter. **“But you will always have a home in me, as long as you desire.”**

Geno was quiet after this statement, unable to find any suitable words to reply to such a heartfelt and compassionate reply. He felt the sting of tears in his eyes as one hand moved to grasp the fabric of their robe. He pressed his forehead further into their chest to hide the strong effect those words had on him. From the slight shudder in Cross’s shoulders, he could find a bit of comfort knowing it wasn’t just him.

“Awww, where’s *my* hug?” Reaper crooned teasingly as he hovered near them with amusement. Even with their deadly touch being suppressed as it was, he still tended to keep a distance from them most of the time.

Erratum gave a huff of a laugh as they moved one hand to guide him down as well, squeezing him in after a few squirms and adjustments from the others. Reaper blinked owlishly as he was pressed up against the group of them.

“Oh…” He muttered as his hands moved to wrap around their torso. He closed his eyes as he rested his chin against Erratum’s shoulder. “This… is nice.” He muttered quietly. Erratum just gave a small sound of contentment as they held the three of them close.

“You said the touches of the Guardians burned,” Geno spoke up as he recovered emotionally. “I don’t feel that when you touch me though.”

Erratum considered this a moment. **“I believe it is because of my physical form. The other beings do not exist in a physical sense, more like pure forms of magic and energy. I have my previous physical body from my old world to contain everything.”** They theorized with a small frown. It was surprising, now that they thought about it, that this physical form had been holding up as it had. Monster bodies existed solely on magic rather than physical matter, however, which might be working to their advantage.

“Sounds complicated.”

“It is. Now… may we proceed with compartmentalizing this very complex trauma?”

“I assure you; I do not require a chaperone on every visit, and this particular plea sounds like an emergency.” Erratum was hastily storing away their sewing supplies as they prepared to answer another call.

“All the more reason for me to go with you! What if it’s like last time, huh?” Cross protested as the god opened one of their portals. “You can’t go out there on your own if you run into those guys again.”

“I can, and I will. I have done it many times before you, don’t forget that.” Erratum reminded him with a look over their shoulder. **“I would feel more comfortable with you staying here with the others while I’m gone. If you are needed, I am more than capable of summoning you. You trust that don’t you?”** Cross slumped his shoulders a bit with a heavy sigh at the question.

“You know I do, but that’s-”

Erratum shook their head as they pulled him into a brief hug. **“I will be back before you know it. Let Geno know this, so he doesn’t worry as well.”** They instructed before pulling away from him. Cross moved to cross his arms tightly with obvious displeasure.

“Fine. I’m not happy about it though.”

“Of course.” Erratum acknowledged as they disappeared through their portal. They briefly saw the conflicted look on Cross’s face before the tear in reality came together again and closed off their world. They did feel bad leaving him there to worry, but they absolutely could not bring him to such a volatile situation. Not with who they were going to see.

They found themselves in a decent-sized bedroom, which must have been well decorated and even luxurious at one point. As it was, the room was barely recognizable as a bedroom except for the presence of an actual bed. The walls had claw-shaped grooves in them and smashed furniture littered the room. Even the sheets on the bed were torn and stained with both blood and what Erratum assumed was dust.

Speaking of dust.

The doors leading out to a balcony were flung wide open on the far side of the room, the curtains that were once covering it shredded and flapping as useless ribbons in the wind. Erratum was slow to approach, trying to remain as quiet as possible as they made their way to the doors. They weren't sure if it even mattered with the amount of screaming and wild whipping of magic that echoed through the area. They managed to wrestle away the shredded curtains from the doorway and ease their way onto the balcony. Their scarf whipped wildly where it hung over their shoulder as the raw, wild magic swirled and lashed through the air around them.

Sitting on the edge of the railing was Dust, clutching his head and giving occasional shouts and sparks of agitated magic. They could see the sparks racing over their body every so often as he screamed and shook. Erratum could barely make out any of the babbles of words he was saying, other than a plea to make it stop and to let it end. The god knew this was going to be the most precarious situation they had dealt with yet.

They raised their firewall immediately in anticipation, and to ease some of the pressure on their body from the battering magic. It served as a good windbreaker at least. They took a quiet breath to mentally prepare themselves for this conversation before steeling their nerves.

"You aren't exactly who I expected to call for me."

The effect was instantaneous as Dust whipped his head around with a fierce snarl. The firewall caught the vicious blast from their summoned construct, though it even pushed the god back a small bit on their feet. The floating blaster faded away after a moment and the crazed monster looked no less hostile than before. Erratum dropped their wall as the whipping of magic calmed a bit with the previous concentrated magic attack.

"I didn't call for you." Dust sneered as they moved themselves to face Erratum, slipping off the railing and standing slightly hunched over. "I don't need help from someone like *you* unless you're here as a sacrificial lamb." They grinned widely at the very idea. "Would you like to help me with that?"

Erratum didn't rise to the threat or show any signs of fear. They raked their eyes over his heaving form and took note of the desperate flares of magic. **"Your soul is burning itself up."**

“What do *you* know?” Dust bit back.

“Your body wasn’t made to handle such a large surge of magic.” Erratum continued to explain without being prompted. **“You’ve continued to kill and build power past the point you should have capped out. Monster bodies are strong, and their souls can hold a wealth of magic, but they have their limitations. The power you seek to build yourself higher will ultimately destroy you.”**

“I can handle it.”

“You can’t,” Erratum denied as they approached him slowly, inching forward ever so slightly.

“Stay away from me.” Dust hissed as they bristled with magic and hostility. “You think I’m dangerous now? Imagine my power when I take *you* out.” He threatened them.

“But you don’t really want that, do you?”

Dust stiffened up at this.

“Despite what you’re saying, even if you truly believe that, somewhere deep down, you’re screaming for help.” Erratum continued to approach him, causing Dust to back up into the railing again. **“You wouldn’t have called out for someone to help you if not. Subconsciously, you’re crying out for someone to stop the torment in your soul. You’re screaming out for forgiveness in a voice you’ve tried to bury down into the recess of your mind.”** They moved to stop a few feet away from them. **“But there is nowhere deep enough in your mind that I cannot hear a true plea for help.”**

“You don’t know me…” Dust muttered as they gripped onto the railing behind him tightly. “You don’t know what I want… you don’t know what I’m feeling!”

Erratum looked on at them with an unreadable expression, unwilling to show their pity and further enrage him. **“I have existed long before you were a thought in the creator’s mind.”** They spoke softly to him. **“I have seen your world, and I know all the details. Whether you try to pretend as though you’ve always been cruel and bloodthirsty, that’s not where you started. You didn’t slaughter because you enjoyed it or for fun. You did it out of a misguided attempt to stop the human from killing all of you instead. You’re aware of the contradictory nature of your wants,**

of your previous plan to force the anomalous force to abandon your world." Dust inhaled sharply in response.

"You spend your time rationalizing and justifying actions you know are wrong. You think your end goal overpowers what sacrifices have to be made." Erratum frowned as they let the pity settle on their face finally. **"And you hate yourself. You hate yourself so intensely that you would resign yourself to sit in a world, alone, forever; waiting for the human to arrive again in the event you were successful. Never resting, never at peace. You know somewhere deep down that your goal is unreachable and that your timeline will never be stable. The cycle will continue despite it all, but you find you've come too far to go back. That's why you stay outside of your world now, to prevent yourself from having to regain all of those levels over and over again."**

"Shut up…"

"Gaining more levels by killing outside of your world will not help you. Your body was not made to handle that, and you *will* die. If you burn up your soul here, outside of your own universe, I'm uncertain what would happen to you. Would you disappear altogether? Would you wind up back in your world? Would there be consequences beyond that?" Erratum could see the terror flash briefly over their face. **"I don't think it's something you want to find out."**

Dust was breathing heavily now, fingers digging into the metal rails as his hands shook. "You're trying to scare me… you're trying to intimidate me into stopping." They accused through clenched teeth. "But *no one* can stop me. No one can stop me now." His voice continued to rise with every sentence he got out. The magic was beginning to flare up again. "I don't need anyone else. Everyone around me is a pawn, a steppingstone toward reaching the power I need to stop it." He claimed as his hand moved behind him discreetly.

"I don't need anyone. I don't need *anyone!*"

Dust lurched forward as his hand withdrew the blade from the elastic on his waist. Erratum was startled by the sudden physical attack, having only been prepared for any magical outburst. They only had a brief amount of time to berate themselves for not expecting that with this monster before the blade was buried in between the space of their ribs. The god lurched forward as static rolled along their body, eyes wide and error windows beginning to pop up on various screens

around them.

Dust inhaled sharply as he still grasped the hilt in both hands, eyes staring at the blinding white in their sockets. He began to hyperventilate as his fingers refused to release the blade. “What…?” He shook as a tremendous amount of power sapped from his body. He felt his knees buckle as he stumbled forward at the sudden weakness in his body. The hot burn of magic had quieted in his soul, leaving it lighter and pain-free.

Something still didn’t feel right about it. Dust continued to panic as he could hear the hallucination beside him begin to screech and tear into him as he took stock of his body. He should be feeling the rush from eliminating (he thinks? The god was still in front of him, but they weren’t moving or speaking) a powerful enemy. He was sickened that it was the exact opposite, however. He felt weak, his soul felt less full, his detachment from a normal kill absent, as he stared at this being. He hadn’t gained anything from this at all. In fact, he came out in the red this time.

Somehow, despite the power of the god, *somehow,*

He had lost levels.

Chapter End Notes

> Oh how I *WISH* I could draw. There are like three scenes in here I would draw the hell out of. ESPECIALLY the group hug, just, ugh. My soul.

Chapter 10: Knives and parties

Chapter Summary

> Erratum gets a bit of a talking to and dishes out some Karma to the deserving. After returning home, they let slip that its sort of 'their birthday'. The resulting shenanigans both amused and confused the god.

Chapter Notes

> This was going to have more plot than just the beginning, but I realized it's 4/04! It's Error Sans's birthday! Woooo! So, have a chapter with some special birthday fluff!
>
> Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The sensation of floating in the Between was familiar to Erratum at this point. They placed a hand over their ribs, seeing the sparks of blue against their hand. It was as though a severed wire was sparking within their chest. They turned their head up sharply as the Guardians descended upon them.

“Ah… always a pleasure to visit.” Erratum spoke sheepishly as Karma swirled around them once more in a comforting spectral embrace. As much as the original conversion had brought them pain, they were able to appreciate the lack of burning their touches brought now.

“*You, while intelligent and merciful, are also reckless and oblivious.*” Karma sighed out around them. Erratum had the decency to scrunch their shoulders up and hide half their face in their scarf. They were a little embarrassed to have this discussion.

“To be fair-”

"*You stand before us after taking a fatal attack. There is nothing to make that less shameful.*" Fate remarked blandly at the other's attempt.

Erratum frowned as they tried to focus on the shapeless being. **"It was a mistake on my part, I agree. I am doing my best and I am doing it alone."** They reminded them with slight frustration.

"For now." Time spoke up, though made no move to further explain this. Erratum didn't like their cryptic behaviour; always being vague to keep future events a secret.

"Am I dead then?" Erratum questioned as they stuck their hand into the wound, noting the lack of pain.

"*Please don't…*" Hope had an audible cringe in their tone as they floated closer with Faith. The two beings tended to stay together. *"You are not dead, but we'd like it if you didn't abuse the lack of dying.*"

"That is a fair request."

"*Not our only one either!*" Faith spoke up cheerfully as Karma moved aside to make way for the other two. Both Guardians circled near Erratum, momentarily giving them flashbacks before they disappeared back into their mind. "*Your little… stunt… has inspired something within us!"*

"To help with the balance of positivity and negativity, and for those unstable monsters. There will be more suffering from the effects of this high-level phenomenon and magic storms."

"Magic storms?" Erratum continued to float there as the two Guardians each placed a hand on either side of their face. There was a series of tingles, like a couple of hypodermic needles prickling up their

mandible up to the greater wing of their sphenoid bone.

"*The event you witnessed that other monster suffering from. That's what we've elected to call it due to the manifestations and effects of it.*" Faith explained as the two Guardians drifted away from them once they finished.

"*Think of these new abilities like a birthday gift. It makes it sound more fun and less like heavy responsibilities.*" Karma remarked as they surrounded Erratum once again. The damaged god blinked once at this.

"Birthday?"

"*Well, I don't know if I would call it that, truly. It is the day that you became what you are now, however.*" That made more sense.

"*We have another request we'd like you to fulfill at your convenience,*" Hope added on after Erratum watched a series of sparks and pixelations run up their arms.

"*Bring Dream and Nightmare here so we make speak to them.*"

Erratum frowned as they looked up in surprise. **"Bring them here? I am certain I could have Dream successfully shift within a temple, but Nightmare…"**

"*At your convenience,*" Hope reemphasized with what was probably a kind smile.

“*As much as we love to have you here, you left your body at a rather inconvenient moment.*” Karma reminded them. Erratum nodded in agreement but quickly looked up after a moment.

“Wait, how does this new power wor-“

“*Good luck!*”

Erratum felt a little dizzy as they came to again, still slumped forward and knife buried in their chest. They waved the mess of error windows out of their field of vision and regained their bearings looking around for Dust. They didn't have to look far, seeing him huddled on the ground with his hands covering the back of his head. He was mumbling hysterically to himself and shaking uncontrollably. Erratum frowned as they couched down and placed a hand on their back, causing him to jerk his head up and stare at them.

"You... no. I-I killed you... I... you..." Dust stammered out as he zeroed in on the knife in their chest. "I know I did... I felt your soul leave... you died." He seemed like he was trying to convince himself.

"**I did not die, no.**" Erratum replied as they pulled their hand away to prevent further overstimulating him. "**And I didn't necessarily *leave,* just... well, it's difficult to explain. God stuff?**" They shook their head as they were unable to find a good explanation. They felt the crazed monster grab onto their robes, attempting to shake the calm god, though they remained unmoved.

"What did you do?! What did you do to me?!" Dust shouted as Erratum stared on with confusion. "I don't know how... you...! You took away my levels! You stole the power I worked so hard for!" He snarled at them, throwing a punch that Erratum easily caught.

"I'm *nothing* without them! Give them back!" He demanded.

"Even if I knew what you were talking about, I would do no such thing. Your violence level is radically high even with the loss." The god frowned as they trailed their eyes down to the hand they were grasping. They rose their brow bone as they saw the familiar symbol of Karma and nodded their head. It made sense that this monster would be marked considering everything he has done. They grasped tighter to his fist, igniting the symbol in a golden light. Their own marking filled with magic as their eyes whited out much like they had the first time they experienced this. They were more prepared for the disconnected feeling as they found themselves standing ankle-deep in freezing snow.

They could see Dust standing before their brother, and the sight nearly made them sick.

Papyrus was slumped down against a rock, bones impaled in what was left of his body as he spoke empathetically to his brother. As he faded into dust, the remaining skeleton dropped to their knees and began to scream and clutch their head. It had to be one of the most horrific things Erratum had witnessed yet.

The scenery shifted as Dust walked through Waterfall, killing monsters as he came across them. Erratum could see clearly the disembodied head of Papyrus floating around him, whispering and encouraging their murderous rampage. Always encouraging more violence, always egging him on, always reminding him of what he's done and how disgusting he is.

Whether that is true or not is not of Erratum's concern.

They found themselves back in their body again a moment later. Dust was yanking on his hand as the god was nearly crushing it in their

grasp.

That specter was now visible to Erratum, circling and hissing insults at Dust. They criticized him for being so weak, for failing to kill an off-guard enemy, for losing levels, and being a failure.

This was suitable punishment? This seemed to only *encourage* the other's behaviours.

"You know he isn't real, don't you?"

Dust froze and stopped his struggling. "What are you talking about?" He spoke lowly, obviously guarded and wary.

"What you're experiencing are hallucinations. Papyrus isn't here. He isn't watching over your shoulder and judging you. Your mind is unwell and has conjured his image in response to the horrors and stress you've put your body and psyche through."

"You never know when to stop talking, do you?" Dust growled while the specter grinned silently at the god.

"Regardless, I've decided that this sort of mental torture is not suitable for retribution." The grip on his hand tightened up further, making Dust wince and yank his arm again. **"So I am taking this away."**

Dust could feel burning up his arm which was far more painful than the other's grasp. As he shouted out his pain, he vaguely noted that his mind had gone quiet. He gasped raggedly as he hung his head. "Papyrus...?" He muttered deliriously.

Erratum continued to hold onto him, not quite finished. "**Instead of these hallucinations, I have found inspiration from your outburst upon me. From this point forward, every kill you make will not empower you. Instead, each life you take will also take your power. Every soul will eat away at your levels, every lost life a lost amount of your magic prowess.**" They could see the fear on Dust's face as he looked up at them again. "**And so it will be.**"

Dust yanked his hand away as the burning subsided, shaking violently as he stared down at it. He couldn't see any outward damage or marks, but the words hung ominously in the air. Though the hisses of his brother were gone, ringing continued in his acoustic meatus.

"You... you fucking *monster*..."

"***I'm* the monster?**" Erratum questioned with genuine confusion. Dust only clenched his fists tighter and stared at them with frustrated tears.

"Do you understand what you've *done?!* I can't... Nightmare will *kill me* if he has no use for me! If I can't kill... if I'm weak..." Dust was hyperventilating at this point at the mere thought of it. This monster had completely screwed him over. He should have known better than to try and tussle with a god.

A third time.

"**What is done is done. I will not release you from this as long as you continue this path.**" Erratum spoke firmly to him. "**When you have learned... when you have truly come to terms with everything; only then.**"

"Get away from me..." Dust gritted out as he pushed himself to his feet and wrapped his arms around his middle.

"When the time comes, you'll call for me."

"I will *never* beg you for anything. I will *never* ask for anything from you. I *hate* you." Dust hissed back at the other. Erratum just shook their head and opened their portal home.

"Even if you hate me, you will. One day."

Geno and Cross were both still waiting at Erratum's altar for their return.

Well, Cross was waiting. Geno was pacing around restlessly.

"You're giving me anxiety," Cross remarked as the other turned and began walking the opposite way again. "Can you at least sit down? You're gonna start wearing a trail into the ground at this rate."

Geno glared back at him in response, though he did stop his pacing. "I figured you of all people would be worried. The last time they went somewhere they were in Horrortale, and I can't imagine any emergency they had to answer is any less life-threatening."

"I am worried, but there's nothing I can do about it now. They said they would contact me if they needed back up and I have to trust they will." Cross sighed as they leaned back on their hands. "Plus, Errata

says Horror isn't so bad. They've never come back with, like, a missing limb or anything. So he's obviously not trying to eat them." That didn't seem to relieve any of Geno's worries.

The wounded skeleton perked up, however, as familiar golden strings created a rift for the god to step through. Geno let out a relieved sigh as he saw them returning.

"There you are! You know, rushing off like that really makes me- ***AAGHH!"*** Geno suddenly screamed as Erratum turned to face them fully. The god seemed befuddled by his reaction, tilting their head with a frown.

"What?"

"There's a KNIFE sticking out of you!"

"Ah, I thought I had forgotten to do something." Erratum hummed as they looked down at the knife. They had forgotten to remove it, having become wrapped up in the series of events that unfolded after they had returned to their body.

"FORGOTTEN?? How do you FORGET a knife is wedged in your ribs?!"

"Well, it wasn't the most pressing matter at the moment."

Cross was quickly at the god's side, frowning in disapproval. "You're not going by yourself anymore. You *promised* you'd call if you needed backup!"

"To be fair, we were chatting just fine when suddenly," They gestured down to their chest. **"A knife."**

"Of course, suddenly." Cross frowned as they grimaced at it. "I... don't feel comfortable removing this." They admitted as they saw how deep it went. "Call Dream, he seems good at all this stuff."

Erratum sighed as they opened their task menu. **"Fine, but only because I *do* feel guilty."** They relented as they pulled up the spirit's information. It only took a few moments to connect, Dream's face coming into view with a confused look.

"Hello? Oh! Hello Errata!" Dream greeted with a frantic wave. "I wasn't expecting to hear from you! Um, can I help you with something?"

"Yeah, you could help this stubborn god's newly acquired wound," Cross complained as he came into view next to Erratum. "None of us here would dare touch it. It's... kind of bad."

Dream seemed alarmed at this statement. "Oh gosh, um, sure if I can help I will. Where... um, where should I meet you?"

"Let me open a portal for you." Erratum moved to tear a new rift in reality, revealing Dream standing at a kitchen counter. He whirled around at the sound of the portal, hanging up his phone as he stepped through.

"Wow... is this where you live? It's very beautiful." Dream praised as he turned to look at the god. He gasped as a hand flew up to his mouth. "Oh, my stars!! What happened?!"

"A knife."

"I can see that!!" Dream sputtered as they rested a hand on the side of their chest. The healing magic helped the immense pain of them attempting to pry it out. "I'm so sorry I'm so sorry I'm so sorry..." Dream frantically whispered as he struggle to pull it out. After a few moments of yanking, the knife finally budged and separated from the god. "Who stabbed you??"

"Dust."

"That checks out," Geno remarked as he hovered nearby with a frown. Dream turned at the sound of the other's voice, brightening up a bit.

"Geno! You look... wow, you look different." Dream noticed as he looked him over. The other no longer had pixelations covering his body, though his right socket wasn't looking too hot. His bloodied shirt was replaced with a newer gold-coloured sweater, most likely made by the god he was tending to. There were no traces of blood on it either. "You look really good, actually! Your mood is so much brighter too! No more pain?"

"Nope." Geno rocked back on his heels with a small grin. "Errata fixed me all up... mostly. Look, there was a lot of damage done and I'm not complaining." He chuckled softly. "They're pretty cool, ya know when they aren't being stupid."

"Hey..." Erratum frowned as they examined the knife. They popped their head back up a moment later as they remembered their meeting. **"Actually, Dream, there's something I wish to speak with you about."** They gestured the spirit over, though Dream seemed confused.

"Okay...? What would that be?" He trailed his eyes over to the altar behind Erratum, eyes wide with wonder. "Wow... you even have your own temple? That's really impressive..."

"Yes, yes. Anyhow, when Dust pseudo-killed me-"

"KILLED you??"

"He killed you?!"

Erratum chose not to address this. **"I entered the Between and spoke with the Guardians. After a... light reprimanding... Hope and Faith requested to see you."** They explained, which made Dream stiffen up.

"M-me? The Guardians want to see *me?"*

"There's an issue," Erratum frowned as Dream tried to wrap his head around this. **"They also want to see Nightmare."**

Dream jolted in surprise at this. "*Nightmare??* How is that going to work? We can't even talk without it ending in a giant fight!"

"I haven't a clue. The Guardians work in frustratingly mysterious ways." Erratum sighed heavily. **"Their phrasing suggests that they wish to see the both of you at the same time as well."**

"That's never going to work! Can't they just talk to me alone? Then maybe one day we can get Nightmare to cooperate?"

Erratum frowned sharply as they stood a bit taller. "**Are you suggesting the Guardians don't know what they're doing?**"

"Nononononono!" Dream quickly backtracked with his hands up and frantically waving in front of himself. "That's not what I was implying at all! I just don't see how that can be pulled off!" He tried to amend. Luckily, Erratum seemed to relax a bit.

"**Also, I apparently have been tasked with more Balance related work.**" Erratum commented as they tried to focus on any new sensation in their body. They closed their eyes and pressed their hands together, attempting to find their center. This was supposed to be for the positivity balance, right? So perhaps focusing on those feelings...

They exhaled slowly as a ball of gold expanded between their hands, resting there as they reopened their eyes. Dream was watching with wide eyes, sensing the concentrated positive energy coming from it.

"Wow... what does it do?"

"**I have no clue, they didn't bother to explain. They stated it's for what they call 'magic storms' and what I can only assume is balancing the high negativity imbalance. Probably a good thing since Nightmare wants my head on a pike.**"

"You've fought with Nightmare? Magical storms?" Dream was so lost trying to comprehend all of this god stuff.

"Yes, he wasn't too happy I wouldn't fight for his side. And apparently, when a monster reaches such a high level of violence, they begin to have lashing outs of their magic. It can burn through their magic, and inevitably burn up their soul. Without stopping the outburst, it will kill them. I assume this is to help neutralize that." Erratum attempted to explain to the best of their knowledge.

"So, you'll be helping us then?" Dream brightened up.

"If you mean traveling around with your group, no. I will still continue to do this on my own." Dream seemed disappointed in hearing this but nodded regardless. Erratum sighed heavily as they settled back against their altar. **"This has been a strange 'birthday', I will say."**

"It's your birthday?!" Cross sprung up at the news, while the other two also immediately perked up. Erratum was beginning to sense they shouldn't have brought it up.

"Sort of? It was the day I became Errata, that is."

"We should celebrate!" Geno enthused, to which the remaining two nodded frantically.

"Celebrate what?" Geno jolted at hearing this voice, whipping around quickly as Reaper floated through a dark portal. "Hello there Geno, always a pleasure."

"Cram it. It's Errata's birthday." Geno informed him with a huff.

"Oh? That is a celebratory occasion." Reaper agreed though Erratum didn't feel the same.

"Really, it's-"

"Oh, let me call Blue! He loves a good party, and he's basically your most loyal follower." Dream laughed as he tapped away on his phone.

"There is no party! This is really unnecessary." Erratum tried again, but things were quickly spiraling out of their control.

"We don't have gifts!"

"I require nothing. Look at all the stuff I already have lying around." Erratum gestured dramatically to their altar and offerings.

"See if Blue can make a cake!"

"I don't require food!"

"Doesn't mean you can't enjoy it! Oh, you can make decorations for this place, right? Come on! It'll be fun!" Cross enthused as he nudged the flustered god.

"You aren't going to let this go, are you?" Erratum sighed as they looked over to Reaper wearily. **"How goes the training?"** They attempted to change the topic to anything but this.

Reaper beamed as they lowered themselves to the ground. The grass wilted a bit, but the flowers didn't seem to shrivel up and die. "It isn't perfect, but I'm making progress." He seemed rather proud of himself.

"**You're making great progress indeed.**" Erratum approved with obvious pride in their expression. "**Since we're apparently having this little get-together, allow me to suppress it entirely for now. One day, you'll be able to do it yourself.**" They promised as they threaded a string around their soul once more.

Dream hung up after a moment, grinning sheepishly. "Blue, uh, is going to get things ready. I'd say maybe an hour or so? Then he'll be ready to swing by."

Wonderful.

Erratum felt ridiculous.

Once Blue had arrived, he had demanded the other wear this *ridiculous* triangular hat that tied uncomfortably around their head. The others had assured them that it was part of the tradition, but they weren't so sure about that. It felt silly and slightly humiliating. The others seemed delighted though, so they supposed they could live with it for now.

Blue had come bearing what they called a 'cake', looking proud of themselves as they sat it on a round table the god had conjured up. Erratum had compromised on the decorations, as ridiculous streamers and balloons were not to their taste. Floral arrangements and archways made it look like a proper garden party, which no one seemed too upset with.

"Kinda romantic, isn't it?" Reaper grinned mischievously while Geno rolled their eyes in exasperation.

"Errata! Bend down a little so I can take a selfie!" Blue called out to them. Erratum crouched down to Blue's level as he held his phone up and threw up a peace sign. "Come on, smile! Don't look so stoic for once!" He insisted. Erratum managed a small smile, which satisfied the other enough to take the picture. "Perfect wallpaper material!" He announced proudly.

"Come on! We're gonna light the candles and sing happy birthday!" Dream called out cheerfully while Blue pushed Erratum insistently. The god didn't budge at the shoves but eventually started moving themselves to the decorated table. The chocolate cake sat in the center, candles circling around the decorative frosting and blazing with tiny flames.

"Why are they on fire? Is this a hazard?"

"Not really, you'll blow them out in a minute anyway!" Blue assured as they stood behind Erratum with the rest of the group. "Okay everyone, on three!" He called out to them. "One, two, three!"

The group broke out into various keys of "Happy Birthday", the tempo all over the place. Despite it all, Erratum was grinning as well. The energy and positivity were absolutely infectious and seeing that it made them all so happy, well, then Erratum was happy too.

As the song wrapped up, Blue blew an annoying horn right near the side of their head. It nearly deafened them, but the joyful laughs and cheers made the annoyance a little less grating.

"Go on! Blow them out and make a wish!"

A wish? What could they possibly wish for?

"Come on, it's part of the tradition! And you can't tell us or it won't come true!" Blue instructed while Dream giggled beside him. Erratum huffed out a faint laugh as they turned back to the flickering candles. It was hard to think of anything they really wanted with all of them surrounding them and chatting happily. The only thing they could think of was they wished for the balance they sought after so much. They wished the suffering of the worlds around them would end. They wished they could simply speak civilly with the creator and come to a suitable middle ground for both of them.

The god inhaled sharply and blew out the candles, closing their eyes with a smile at the cheers that followed.

Chapter End Notes

404! Happy birthday, Errata <3

Chapter 11: Checkmate

Chapter Summary

Erratum answers a peculiar call and is warned of an imminent attack. This leads to some surprise confrontations and a tense game with a manipulative spirit.

Chapter Notes

Hello again, yes this is once more quite early. I now write instead of studying and it is a coping mechanism for my crippling anxiety trying to get things sorted out for my nursing practicums.
At any rate, I had a fun time exploring character dynamics and putting little sprinkles of future plot throughout the chapter. Oh and somehow all roads have led to some sort of Geno/Reaper pining? I'm not sure how that happened? Definitely was not planned, but it's cute in a weird way.

Enjoy.

Erratum had found through further group sessions in their realm that keeping their hands busy kept them calm. The more they spoke about the balance, about the creator, and their duties, the more their practiced calm began to ripple. Geno had been the one to point out that the god tended to summon their strings and toy with them when they got like this.

Seeing how well they were with sewing and knitting, it didn’t take too long for Erratum to take up the hobby. They found peace in stitching and weaving threads and yarn together into something new and useful. It made them feel like they weren't just sitting idle and doing nothing, even if it wasn't the most efficient use of their time. With the number of supplies that began to appear on their altar, however, it was difficult to resist the urge to absently knit. That is how they found themselves now; knitting peacefully while Cross raided the altar and

munched absently on whatever he could find. While the god had developed a surprising sweet tooth after the little 'party' that was thrown, they still did their best not to indulge.

"Looks like Red dropped some of that good dark chocolate for ya." Cross commented from his spot.

They *tried* not to indulge.

Erratum had looked away from their project and was in the middle of the internal debate of giving in to the craving or ignoring it. They didn't get much of a chance to consider it as the rise of voices swelled in their mind again and they picked out a particular voice. They tilted their head up a bit, listening intently to the unheard plea only they could decipher. This person had never called out to them before, usually waiting until Erratum dropped by like they normally did.

"I know that look," Cross commented as he stood beside the god, able to creep up on them while they were distracted. "You're doing the posture of 'a voice I have to go answer' and I'm not letting you leave alone." He crossed his arms stubbornly as he stared down at the god. Erratum looked back up at him as they recognized his presence and sighed.

"While the last emergency ended... poorly, perhaps-"

"Psuedo-death is what I believe you called it," Cross replied dryly.

"I am capable of traveling on my own. I've been thoroughly chastised by the other Guardians and do not want a repeat experience, thank you very much." They shuddered as they remembered that humiliation.

"I don't remember asking about all that," Cross commented as Erratum rose to their feet and stashed away their supplies. "I remember saying 'not letting you leave alone' and I'm inclined to follow through with that." Erratum gave a roll of their eyes as they attempted to walk away from the other. "I'm like a tick, Errata. I'm real hard to get rid of once I'm latched on."

"**A repulsive comparison, I might add.**" Erratum cringed as they both came across Geno sitting in his hammock. "**Geno, please tell Cross that I am perfectly capable of answering calls for myself.**"

Said monster was obviously caught off guard by them, jolting a bit and nearly flipping out of his hammock. He looked back at the two of them with a huff, moving one hand subtly toward his back to shield it. "You're on your own with this one. You think he's gonna listen to *me?* He's brash and trigger-happy." Cross didn't seem too pleased with this description, scowling a bit at him.

"I'm not trigger-happy, I'm *prepared.*" Cross corrected with narrowed eyes. "I said I would protect Errata as long as I am at their services and I intend to do just that." He stated firmly while Erratum sighed in displeasure. The god trailed their eyes down to where Geno's arm was hidden away, interest piqued at the guarded position.

"**What is it that you're hiding there?**" The god questioned Geno. They were admittedly a bit curious, and if it got them off this topic and distracted, then all the better.

Geno stared at them for a moment as he attempted to come up with any words to say. Cross seemed to lose his serious edge at this, perking up a bit. "Yeah, whatcha got?" He grinned, the stoic soldier persona vanishing instantly.

"Nothing! I don't have anything!" Geno fretted as he managed to land on his feet after struggling with his hammock.

"Show me your hand then!"

Cross grinned as he rushed forward toward the other. Geno quickly turned around, both hands held tightly to his chest now as he tried to escape. Erratum, ever the antagonist and hoping to keep them both thoroughly distracted for a while, subtly shot a string out and snagged one of his ankles. Geno yelped as he nearly tripped, stumbling a bit as the string kept him from fleeing any further. Cross smirked as he grabbed the skeleton by the shoulders, whirling him around with a loud "Aha!"

"Wow, dude. *Wow*." Cross snickered immediately as Geno flushed and scowled at him fiercely.

Geno was clutching tightly onto a pretty, silky black feather in both hands now to protect it. Erratum released his ankle and tilted their head a bit as they observed the other's posture and expression.

"Shut up, shut up, shut up! I don't wanna hear it! Shut up!" Geno immediately began to hiss with embarrassment as Cross laughed and threw his arm around Geno's shoulders. "Get off me! This doesn't mean anything!" He protested loudly as Cross gave him a knowing look.

"Geno, pal, bud..." Cross snickered as he continued to hold him in a near headlock to keep him there. "You spend all your time complaining about Reaper and how much you can't stand him,"

"Cross, I *swear*-"

"And you are fooling absolutely *no one.*" Cross couldn't keep his laughs in as Geno began to shake in both rage and potentially mortification as well.

Erratum found a perfect time to slip away into a subtle portal as the sound of a charging blaster began to fill the air.

Erratum exhaled sharply as they landed directly in Horror's home, startling briefly at the intense look they were met with. Erratum could feel the tension rolling off the other, but his face didn't give away any distress. It was hard to gauge the situation just by taking in the skeleton and the environment. "**I apologize it took me a bit to get here, it was not my intention to make you wait.**" They assured, attempting to decipher his expression again quickly. "**What is it that you need?**"

Horror grunted a bit as he looked over his shoulder a moment despite the house being empty. "Wanted... to warn." He rasped out after a moment, fully catching Erratum's attention. Horror frowned and furrowed his brow bone, giving a gruff sound of frustration as he attempt to form his thoughts into words. "Nightmare... sending us to..." The monster went quiet a moment, eye fuzzing and unfocusing a moment with the intensity. "Underswap!" Horror finally recollected as he looked up at Erratum. "Bait you... use as hostage..."

"**Nightmare is planning to send all of you to Underswap to kidnap Blue.**" Erratum clarified, eyes fierce as they took in Horror's words. "**You're absolutely sure?**"

"Yes... positive." Horror nodded firmly.

"**I'm honestly surprised you would tell me this**

information." Erratum admitted as Horror continued to glance around anxiously. "**Does your loyalty not lie with your leader?**"

"Loyalty... lies with you." The intensity of the statement paired with the glow of his eyelight momentarily left Erratum speechless. To gain such trust and respect from someone who had originally wanted to chew on their soul was an honor. And a little daunting, admittedly.

Though the height disparity wasn't as great as it was with others, Erratum still placed a hand on the top of his head, mindful of the open wound. "**Your choice to be potentially self-sacrificing humbles me. I can only hope to be as loyal to all of those who follow me.**" They spoke earnestly, huffing a small laugh as Horror squeezed them into a tight hug. "**And be as comforting.**"

Horror released them after a healthy squeeze that could probably snap bones on regular monsters. Erratum only stumbled a bit before righting themselves again. "**Right, with this information, I will go ahead and see myself to Underswap. You can be assured that you will not be harmed, and I can promise that no attacks will be thrown.**" Horror seemed perplexed by how they would manage this feat but nodded regardless. They'd figure it out, Horror was confident.

Erratum bid him a kind farewell before hopping universes once more. They found themself squarely on their welcome mat, attempting to do the polite thing and knock on the door properly. They could hear a distant thump and what was potentially glass shattering on the floor. The door flung open enthusiastically, Blue standing on the other side with the usual cheerful smile. That expression seemed to brighten impossibly more as he saw Erratum standing there.

"Oh! Hello Errata!" Blue greeted brightly as he grasped the god's hand and pulled them inside. Erratum followed without a fight, moving to settle themselves on the couch while Blue scurried back into the kitchen. Erratum assumed that's where the other had been before they had knocked if the sound of clinking glass was to be believed. Blue

returned after another moment with a mug and presented it to Erratum with a pleased expression. "Not my usual offering, but, a good one I think!" He assured as the god gave it an unsure look. "I know you don't eat a lot, but you'll like this! It's hot chocolate!" He tempted the other.

Erratum was thoroughly tempted as they accepted the mug and took a generous gulp. It was warm and rich, satisfying the ridiculous craving they hadn't been able to curb before they were called to Horrortale. "**You're right, this is very good. You spoil me with your pastries and various treats.**" They remarked with a pleasing smile. "**Not that I am complaining, of course.**"

"Mweheh, I've certainly gotten a lot better than I used to be!" Blue agreed as he hoisted himself up on the cushion beside Erratum, tucking himself into their side and watching them. "So... I love having you here, but is there a reason for the sudden visit?" He questioned curiously. The god usually communicated with him through an open portal rather than directly entering his world.

Erratum set the now empty mug aside and nodded their head. "**I got intel that Nightmare's group will be here shortly to take you hostage.**" They explained calmly. Blue tensed against them at this information. "**Don't be afraid, that is why I'm here. Their hope is to use you to lure me into Nightmare's domain, so it is me they want, not you.**"

"You don't seem very concerned by this."

"**Not at all.**" Erratum replied honestly as they rested a comforting hand on Blue's head. "**Nightmare's group is one I've become familiar with. I know their weaknesses, and Nightmare is an enigma that I plan to dissect in my own time.**" They perked their head up as they sensed a few souls entering through a rift. "**I would like for you to head to your room and shut the door. I will deal with this.**" They instructed. Blue seemed indignant at this request.

"But I can help! I fight all the time!" Blue protested immediately with a flash of genuine anger for a moment. He was tired of people viewing him as too kind and vulnerable to fight. Erratum seemed to sense his rising frustration and rested both hands on his shoulders to keep his attention.

"**There will *be* no fighting. I am quite aware you can fight, and I have observed you fighting for several years now even before we met.**" Erratum reassured him, staying alert for the approaching monsters. "**This is something I must do alone for it to work. I need you to trust me.**" Blue still looked reluctant, but his shoulders sagged after a moment and he nodded his head. "**Thank you.**"

Erratum allowed the other to give him a brief hug before the smaller monster rushed up the stairs and slammed his door closed. Erratum did feel bad, truly, but this was to keep Blue from interfering with their plans. Which, if he had been here to see, he would have most definitely done.

They didn't have much time to think about that before the door was broken down.

Horror stepped past the splintered remains of the door, hand grabbing and yanking at his socket as Dust and Killer followed them in.

"Kay boys, it's a simple mission. Grab the kid and hightail it back to the manor, got it?" Killer instructed his two lackeys.

"**Honestly, the door was unlocked. None of that was necessary.**"

The group froze at the sound of the god. Killer cursed as he whirled

around and saw Erratum lounging comfortably on the couch. They even had an empty cup right next to them! All cozy and waiting for them without any fear in their features.

"Might I ask why you are actively breaking and entering one of my follower's homes?" Erratum questioned dryly, noting silently how Horror lagged back a bit with an apologetic expression briefly flashing over his face.

"Don't play dumb, strings!" Killer hissed as he brandished a knife. "You obviously knew we were coming, so how'd you do it? You been spying on us?" He growled.

"You appear to think I have enough free time to watch your group like a reality television show." Erratum rose to their feet, keeping acutely aware of the weapons that were drawn in response. **"I told you that I would begin to appear when you mess with worlds. I can sense my follower's world's danger."** Not necessarily the truth, but they didn't need to know that. The scowl they received told them the others were too wary to think twice about it.

"Whatever! If this won't work, we'll find another way to bring you to boss!" Killer threatened them. Erratum rolled their eyes in exasperation as they turned and began opening a rift.

"If that's all this is about then allow me to make this easier." Erratum stepped through the portal and gave them an unimpressed look. **"Honestly, it seems a little dramatic when you all know how I can be contacted already."** They left it at that as the portal closed again. The group stood there silently for a moment as they tried to understand what just happened.

"Say... how do they know where our hideout is?"

"They're a god, Killer. How do you think?"

"Dumb... going home..." Horror grunted as he dragged his axe along the ground. The other two were hesitant but eventually followed the horror monster out of the house.

In the end, they accomplished what they wanted. Just not at all the way they had expected.

Nightmare gave a frustrated sigh as he scrubbed his hands over his eyes in exhaustion. He was having one of his 'better' days as his lackeys would call it; head clearer and the suffocating negative aura more controlled. The darker spirit didn't seem to be aware of the rise and fall of his behaviours and the others wouldn't dare speak about it to him. It was a minefield trying to maneuver around Nightmare and gauge what his mood was for the day, ever-shifting and unpredictable. On days where he was able to focus, however, he spent it updating and going over current territory that fell under his kingdom. It had been a frustrating amount of time since he had expanded, but with the addition of Erratum poking into worlds and driving his people back, it was becoming more difficult to keep up. Targeting neutral grounds had begun to look more favourable despite the extra attention it would inevitably bring.

He gritted his teeth at a quiet knock on the door. He had sent his goons off to retrieve the swap Sans not ten minutes ago and they were already back to bug him? Despite how capable the group was, he had sincere doubts that they had the ability to smoothly pull it all off in such a short amount of time. Especially not with how much Killer liked to toy with his victims before killing them or bringing them prisoner. With a heavy sigh, he returned to marking off areas on the parchment spread in front of him, not bothering to glance up at the door.

"Enter."

He hardly acknowledged the door opening and shutting, scowling as he struck through the territory of Outertale aggressively. It wouldn't do well to try *that* again. "What is it this time? This better be to tell me the star idiot is secure and in a holding cell." He drawled out, more exhausted and annoyed than threatening.

Erratum glanced around the study a moment, appreciating the details. The walls were a pleasant dark purple with black accents on them, bookshelves aligned neatly against them and full of tomes. It was obvious that the darker spirit was interested in magic, both property and theoretical judging by some of the titles. They looked back to Nightmare after another moment and realized he hadn't even looked up to see who was in his presence. That was surprising to Erratum, as they figured the other would be keenly aware of their surroundings.

"I hope you don't mind that we decided to skip some steps in that plan."

Nightmare tensed as his tendrils reared up defensively. He jerked his head up and saw the god standing before him, the epitome of calm as always. He silently cursed himself for having his guard so low; this skeleton could have killed him easily if they had so desired it. He slammed his hands down on his desk and rose to his feet with a threatening thrash of appendages. His fury only burned higher as the god ignored him in favour of examining a row of books. It took him several moments of observation to deduce that the other was not ignoring him to provoke a reaction, but was genuinely taking interest in the environment. Erratum wouldn't be so careless as to ignore the obviously threatened spirit. Nightmare managed a calming breath before begrudgingly resting his fist on his chest.

"**These are old,**" Erratum observed as they withdrew a well-loved

leather-bound tome. "**Do you miss practicing complex magic? Studying the theoretics of it isn't the same, but it still shows a lasting appreciation for the art.**" They commented as they thumbed through it carefully. "**I'm sure that's not why you wanted to bring me here, however.**"

Nightmare steeled his expression again and collected their cool once more. There was no riling this monster up, so it would do no good to expend energy attempting to intimidate or attack them. Plus, he didn't want to destroy his study. "You would be correct." He voiced, leaving the comfort of his desk and observing them from afar. "Although your point is valid, mostly. I long for nothing but total control of the multiverse, but magical theory and spells are fascinating topics to study." He agreed.

Erratum nodded once as they replaced the book, eying the chess set near the closed-off window. "**I haven't played a decent game since visiting Time.**" They remarked as they found themselves near the fancy-looking set. "**Of course, it's impossible to win again Time. Not when they're calling check in 20. Never play a strategy game with a being that can practically see the future.**" They advised as they turned a rook in their hand. They could feel Nightmare's eye boring into them, but they chose to ignore it. Either he would speak up and get to the chase or Erratum would continue to comment on every little thing in the room until the spirit lost his patience.

"Perhaps I could indulge you while we talk, then." Nightmare offered, admittedly tempted at the idea of playing against someone who didn't flip the board when they lose. Or eat the pieces.

Erratum didn't respond verbally, only settling down into the chair on one side of the chess table. Nightmare moved to the opposite side, able to directly observe the god now face-to-face. He made a small gesture with his hand insistently. "White goes first." He encouraged as Erratum glanced over their pieces and considered the possible moves. It was quiet for a few minutes as the two took their turns at a slow pace, attempting to size each other up and determine their strategy. In the end, Nightmare broke the silence.

"What is it that you seek in this plane?" Nightmare glanced up at the other's face briefly as he moved his pieces to attempt a check. "You go world-to-world responding to distress calls, yet you turn away my idiot brother and his little friends. Surely you don't work out of the kindness of your heart?" Erratum hardly acknowledged the question as they escaped from being checked, moving a rook to capture a piece soon after.

"**I'm the god of Balance,**" Erratum responded with the same calm, ethereal voice as always. "**And as you could imagine, the multiverse is far from being aligned and in order. I feel you take considerable pride in that.**" They rose their brow bone as they said this, training their eyes on the obviously amused spirit.

"I care not for the balances of the universes."

"**You will when the multiverse is destroyed and you die with it.**" Erratum replied firmly, emphasizing the point with an aggressive move of their piece. "**Check in two.**" Nightmare appeared even further amused by this, and Erratum was thankful for their practiced calm so as not to give the other the satisfaction of tasting their frustration.

"So dramatic," He chuckled as he redirected his piece and restrategized. "I don't need to consume the entire multiverse in darkness to maintain control. It's more fun to leave a few alive to attempt to rebel against me. Make enough worlds fear you, the others will begin to bow out of the conflict. People are loyal only to themselves and their wellbeing," Nightmare stated as they took a white rook from the board and rolled it between his fingers. "Are you willing to sacrifice those who trust you in order to stop me? Is the balance more important to you than your little peons?"

Erratum narrowed their sockets the slightest bit as they watched the

other attempt to toy with their emotions. That's what he was best at, after all.

"You project your own view onto me," Erratum remarked with a shake of their head. **"I don't send others to fight for me. I am not some lax god that rallies armies and cavalry to fight under my reign or worship."** They smirked a bit as they gripped onto their queen. **"I am the driving force behind it all. The sacrifices I have made have all been against my own person. My time, my sweat, my blood... and perhaps you're right."** They hummed as they allowed Nightmare to take his turn. **"They won't love me for being a martyr. No one will bow at my feet or cower before me when I walk by. And if that is the case,"** They gave a soft laugh at the scrunch in Nightmare's face as he picked out a piece to move. **"Then I'm doing everything right."**

"You waste your talents on something that can never be achieved." Nightmare scoffed as his tendrils curled and swished behind him. "Nothing is perfect, and there will never be a permanent state of balance. There will always be tipping, there will always be injustice and power struggles."

"Perhaps, but not so much if those in charge of *their* side of the balance do their job."

"You expect me to continue to be the yin to that idiot's yang?" Nightmare growled at the suggestion. "I'd rather let the universes fall into the void."

"Hope and Faith sure hope you would consider it." Erratum frowned at the strong disdain the other projected. **"They wish to have an audience with the two of you one day."**

"Hope and Faith, heh." Nightmare shook his head and closed his eyes

in disbelief. "Of all the Guardians. They can coddle up to my brother all they'd like, but they don't interest me."

"**Not up to your aesthetic?**" Nightmare gave them a sour look at this. "**At any rate, if this was a way to intimidate me or coerce me into allowing you to continue your free reign, then I'm sorry to say it's not very convincing.**" Erratum informed him as they met their single eye dead on with their own.

"**I will not be moved.**" Erratum left it at that as they clacked their piece audibly against the table.

"**Checkmate.**"

Nightmare clenched their jaw tightly as Erratum sat there calmly, which somehow was worse than when his brother gave him those hopeful looks between pleas. "You play well, better than my idiots at least."

"**I'll take the backhanded compliment.**" Erratum shrugged, raising one hand as a tendril snaked out at them. "**I wouldn't do that. If you recall,**" They grasped onto the wriggling appendage, watching as it curled away and melted into a toxic pool on the table. "**It's not very effective.**"

Nightmare jolted back again, the chair falling over as he stood up abruptly. He couldn't figure out how the other could do that, and if they could do this, what they could potentially do to the rest of his body. "Aren't you just special?" He muttered bitterly as Erratum opened their task menu and reset the board effortlessly. The spirit allowed his eye to rake over the transparent window before it quickly

vanished. "I don't have to attack you to hurt you." He smirked after a moment of consideration. "Your compassion is your downfall. You appeared here willingly because your little Blue was in danger of being targeted by me." He noted how Erratum eyed him with intensity now. "I don't have to kill you, just those that you love. The negativity from *you* would be a power boost to me that would give me unfathomable strength."

Erratum walked calmly over to Nightmare as he spoke, never interrupting him. They stopped only a few feet away from him, one hand reaching down and gripping his shoulder. Nightmare stiffened as he felt the corruption under it bristle and bubble.

"I think,"

Erratum squeezed down harder on his shoulder, causing Nightmare to nearly buckle as the thick corruption pooled down his arm and onto the floor. He glowered up at them with his cyan eye, baring his teeth at them like a feral animal. It was an expression Erratum felt suited Horror more.

"You probably don't want to test the limits of my mercy." Erratum gave him a small smile, chilling even the king of negativity.

Erratum pulled their hand back after that, grimacing a bit at the glob of negativity that clung to them. **"I cannot understand why you Dreamtale twins seem to melt and break when I touch you."** They shuddered as they shook their hand clean. Nightmare pressed his hand to his shoulder as though he were staunching a wound and glowered at the god. The words registered after a moment, tendrils swishing once more like an angry cat's tail.

"*You* were the one that freed him."

"**Accidentally, I might add.**" Erratum excused as they made sure none of the other's slime clung to their robes. "**All for the best, I suppose, since you threw positivity and negativity so far out of balance. Dream kept this multiverse somewhat stable these past hundred years or so.**" They informed him with a pointed look.

"So, you choose to continue to oppose me."

"**I oppose anyone who threatens this plane.**" Erratum corrected him. "**If the balance were tipped the opposite direction, I would oppose Dream. I don't work based upon what is right or wrong, only on what I have been made to do. My morality is in shades of grey.**" Nightmare narrowed his eye at them with a shake of his head. "**You don't have to understand all of it, only that as long as the balance is too far to your side, I will be against you.**" Golden strings pulled open a rift behind them, allowing them to back up into it without having to take their eyes off the spirit. With how riled up he had become, they couldn't risk turning their back on them.

"We'll see about that." Nightmare grinned viciously at them. "We'll see how long it takes to break you. How much you can really handle on your own before it all comes crumbling down. And then where will that lead you?" He chuckled as he held his hands up in front of himself. "Right back to me."

Erratum scanned him up and down before shaking their head. "**As I said before, it'll be a cold day, Nightmare.**" They waved their hand once before the threads stitched the rift between them back together, leaving Nightmare in his study, alone.

Nightmare slumped a bit as he allowed the rage to fully consume him. He zeroed his eye in on the standing mirror at the corner of the room and stormed over to it. He grabbed the cloth covering it roughly and yanked it away, angling the mirror correctly to view his entire body

with ease. Nothing seemed out of order; the corruption was already back to its stable form and flowing without interruption. He made eye contact with his reflection a moment later, seeing a flash of something behind the eyelight.

"You disgust me."

He snarled at the image before piercing through the glass with a sharpened tendril.

Chapter 12: Confrontation

Chapter Summary

Erratum gets a thorough scolding before hopping over to reconvene with Horror. Way more is on the horizon, however.

Chapter Notes

It's your favourite non-binary queen here. Back at it again with another chapter that I, for once, had completely planned out. The next chapter is gonna be... an interesting challenge to my writing I believe. You'll see.

Enjoy.

Feel free to shoot me your comments and excitement on tumblr now!
https://www.tumblr.com/blog/devcipher

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"*ERRATA!*"

The god froze as they stepped back into their world through one of their rifts. They briefly considered ducking back out at the sound of the two irate mortals rapidly approaching. They ultimately sighed and decided to face it head-on, knowing they'd ultimately hear about it later if not. Cross was half jogging toward them, which made Erratum briefly wonder if he was going to outright attempt to tackle them to the ground. Geno was following close behind him at a more moderate pace. The god was relieved when Cross simply stopped in front of them with a firmly set scowl on his face.

"I-"

"Do *not,*" Cross inhaled sharply as he collected his irritation to more properly address the higher being. "Give me any excuses. I don't want to hear them. I told you I was going to be going with you from now on and you tricked me! You got me distracted so you could slip away without me!" He clenched his fists tightly as Geno stood next to him, looking equally displeased but not voicing it. "Now I know I can't trust you to keep yourself safe, so I'm *really* gonna have to start acting as a guard." Erratum groaned a bit at this.

"Nothing happened and I am still in one piece. Horror tipped me off to some trouble and I prevented it from happening." Erratum reassured him at the scowl on his face. **"Oh, and I had a strangely interesting game of chess with Nightmare."**

"Nightmare was there??" Cross spoke with alarm, eyes narrowing further at this.

"No no, I portaled to his manor and met with him in his study." Erratum corrected with a flippant wave of their hand.

"*You just straight broke into his hideout?!"* Geno shouted with disbelief, hands raising in a motion that signaled he was barely restraining choking the god.

"He wanted to talk to me."

"And?? That doesn't mean you should just??" Geno sputtered as he tried to find the words to express why this was *not* okay. Cross just pinched the bridge of his brow and took a deep inhale before exhaling slowly.

"I'm never letting you out of my sight again."

"**That seems extreme.**" Erratum insisted to him with a shake of their head. "**I was just popping back in to show you that everything is fine. I have to check back in with Horror and make sure no one caught wind of him helping me.**" They turned to open a portal as they said this, jolting a bit as Cross grasped the back of their robe.

"Not without me you're not." Cross gave them a pointed look that just *dared* the other to fight him on it. Erratum released a long-suffering sigh as their arms dangled loosely at their sides in defeat.

"**Your weapon must remain unsummoned at all times unless I signal otherwise. Physical weapons must be sheathed as well.**" They instructed him, to which he nodded once to show he understood. "**Great,**" They muttered under their breath as they finally opened their portal and dramatically gestured toward it. "**After you then.**" Cross didn't comment on their tone as they stepped through the portal first.

Geno was giving Erratum the same annoyed look that he always did. "You might be powerful and clever, but you're not impervious to damage. Just let us worry about you, okay? And try to help?"

"**So you *are* worried then.**" Erratum grinned a bit wider as Geno threw his hands up and walked back in the same direction he had arrived from. The god laughed quietly as they finally entered Horrortale through their portal. Cross was standing nearby, scarf tucked up all the way to his nasal aperture and obviously on high alert. He nodded to Erratum before flanking their side as they walked. Erratum felt this was entirely unnecessary, but they also didn't have the energy to protest any further. "**Horror is very protective of his territory, so please do not provoke him. If he thinks you're a threat he *will* lash out at you.**"

It didn't take them too long to reach Snowdin, which was barren as always. There weren't ever many people hanging around, too suspicious of one another. Erratum paused as they heard the same swelling voice in their mind again, much more frantic than last time. They began to speedwalk after this, causing Cross to pick up the pace as well.

"What's the matter?" Cross questioned with alarm at their sudden shift in pace.

"**I can hear Horror praying. Something isn't right.**" They explained briefly as they found themselves quickly at the front door of the rundown home. They jiggle the doorknob, finding it locked as it normally was. They knocked frantically on the door and waited for an answer. Several moments of silence passed before they pounded their fist on the door. "**Horror? It's Errata, please open the door. I will portal in there if I have to.**" They warned with a frown.

"I can break it down."

"**You'll do no such thing.**" Erratum frowned as they leaned against the door and attempted to make it budge. A prickling sensation washed over their body as they did so, causing windows to randomly pop open and closed around them.

"Uh, Errata? You're like... I don't know, glitching out. I don't know how else to put it." Cross sounded alarmed as he watched the other seemingly fizzle in and out at some points, especially on their shoulder where they were pushing on the door. Erratum didn't have time to respond before they felt the pixelations roll over their body and their vision fuzzed out momentarily with the blinding glitching. A sensation, much like what they assumed a teleport felt like, washed over them before their vision finally returned.

"Um?? Errata??" Cross spoke frantically as he pounded on the door. "You just like... clipped through the door?? Are you okay?" He called from the other side. Erratum frowned as they looked down at their hands, seeing the pixelations roll up their arms with a sound much like binary code being generated. They shook their head and dismissed the strange occurrence for the moment and opened the door for their... guard. Cross quickly entered the home and looked them over with obvious concern.

"What the hell was that?" He demanded with a frustrated glare. "Warn a guy next time, would ya?!"

"**I honestly don't even know what happened.**" Erratum admitted to him. "**That's never happened before, and I'm not exactly certain what it means.**"

They both ceased their conversation at the sound of what the god would describe as a primal wail. Erratum wasted no time jogging up the stairs toward Horror's room, Cross tailing them the entire way. Thankfully, the door wasn't even shut all the way, so they didn't have to attempt whatever clipping they'd done to get in the house. Erratum slowly pushed the door open and took in the state of the room. It appeared far worse than the upturned and disheveled living room, that was for certain.

The bed was shredded apart, the stuffing and bedding inside rearranged into a makeshift sort of nest bedding that was also lined with curtain shreds and gutted pillows. The window was also shattered, allowing the chilly air to fill the room and blow stray papers and shredded material around. Horror lay curled in a fetal position in his strange bedding, hand yanking harshly at the bottom of his socket while his other hand clawed at the front of his shirt. Erratum quickly dropped to their knees in front of him and grasped both wrists to keep them from further self-harm.

"**Horror, please, calm down and look at me.**" Erratum instructed

him gently, waiting for the other to respond to their presence. Slowly, the fuzzing in their eye sharpened once more and he made eye contact with the god. "**Good... now, tell me what happened. What has you so frantic?**" They pressed with a firm yet concerned tone. Horror cringed as he attempted to lift his hand to his empty socket again, only to be stopped by the other's firm grip.

"Nightmare... was real mad." Horror began, voice rasping out and sounding rougher than normal. He must have been in a bad state for quite a bit. "Failed to get... hostage. Lost leverage... to make you comply." He hitched his breath with rising panic again. "Took anger out... on everyone. Hit...punished... Took away... food privilege. No food... because of me. Everyone... hungry..." He continued to babble while Erratum kept his wrists firmly grasped.

"**Your worries are valid, but I assure you that I can supply them with food.**" Erratum soothed his major worry. They understood that considering his world, food was considered the most precious resource that was more a luxury rather than a guarantee. Nightmare obviously knew where to hit to really cause suffering among his subordinates, which the god found repulsive. They had caused this, however, and they intended to fix it. "**No one will go without so long as I'm here.**"

Horror seemed to slowly relax at this, going boneless and limp as Erratum released his hands. They could hear the monster muttering quiet thank you's to them over and over again while Cross finally had the courage to fully enter the room. He elected to remain silent, seeing that Erratum had the situation more than under control. He was just here for backup in case things got messy. Horror began to sit up, however, and there was no aggressive air around him. Cross allowed himself to relax his stiff posture a bit, seeing this monster wasn't an active threat.

"Help? Even after... what happened?"

"**I cannot in good Faith ignore a request that displays your selflessness for others. You never mentioned anything about yourself and I'm certain you need to eat as well.**" Erratum rested a hand carefully on the skeleton's skull. "**Which, while we're on the topic, I had an idea regarding this food insecurity.**" They could see this got his attention as his eyelight sharpened and nearly pierced through their skull with its intense gaze. "**I had mentioned it to another friend of mine as a possibility when you regained a decent amount of strength and magic, and considering your speech patterns and activity level, I believe now is as good as ever.**"

Horror continued to watch them as Erratum opened a new portal to a spread of land with rolling fields and a bright blue sky. Horror slowly got to his feet and moved to examine it, almost transfixed by it. Erratum encouraged him forward, and the monster wasted no time stepping into the new world. Erratum followed shortly after, Cross taking up the rear.

It was easy to see that this location resided on a countryside-style land. A quaint cottage was visible a few acres out along with a row of stables and a barn nearby. Crops of various spread were blooming and fruiting in their selective fields while a few Langstroth hives sat quietly buzzing in a flowering area. Both Horror and Cross were enraptured by the scenery, both vigilant monsters dropping their guards a bit.

"Well, howdy stranger."

Erratum gave a soft smile as another skeleton approached them, wearing a straw hat and worrying a bundle of wheat head between their teeth. "**Hello, Farmer Sans.**" They greeted respectfully. "**I thought I would bring the monster I had been speaking about the last time we visited.**"

Erratum had a decent amount of respect for Farmer Sans. The only

prayer he'd ever sent them had been not for himself, but for one of his livestock. Erratum wasn't the best at healing and was certainly no veterinarian, but they managed to assist with bringing the animal back to good health. "**I trust your cow is still well?**"

"Thanks to you she is. Didja' wanna take a look fer yourself?" The farmer questioned as he leaned against the pitchfork stuck in the ground.

"Nooo thanks, we're good. No cows." Cross dismissed quickly with a wave of his hand. Erratum threw a strange look at Cross at his quick and rather odd response. The other seemed to notice this as well.

"Is that so? Well, no big deal. Ain't gonna hurt my feelings." He chuckled while Cross yanked nervously at his scarf. Farmer Sans turned his eyes back onto Horror, who stiffened a bit at the appraising look. "So lemme make sure I understand this. Yer wanting to try and cut a deal fer fresh produce and supplies, right?" He questioned. Horror had no knowledge of this, looking to Erratum in hopes they would respond.

"**That is correct.**" Erratum agreed as they pulled up their task menu and tapped away on it. "**Potentially use some square feet for planting as well. I feel curbing the aggressive appetites will reduce hostility, and if we can manage that, then growing their own food would be a good safety net. Waterfall has some rich soil and is plenty damp for most seeds, and teaching some of them how to properly sow and raise crops promotes autonomy.**" They explained.

"That's an awful lot yer askin' for."

"**You know I would never ask for so much without proper payment.**" Erratum assured as they withdrew a sack from their

inventory. The contents of the sack clinked about as they handed it off to the farmer, who jolted forward a bit in surprise at the weight.

"Sheesh, you ain't gotta butter me up *this* much." He assured as he examined the content of the pouch. "This gotta be what, 2? 3 thousand gold?" He spoke with disbelief.

"Honestly I stopped counting at some point and just kept shoveling." Erratum replied honestly with a slight shrug. **"I don't use the stuff and it continues to appear every single day. I'd like to think my followers would be happy to know their donations are going toward beneficial sources."**

"Phew, well consider me sold." Farmer Sans chuckled heartily as he looked back at Horror for a moment. "You, boy," He addressed him, causing the monster to stiffen up considerably at the call. "If yer gonna be apart o' this, yer gonna be workin' fer me." He informed the startled monster. "Ya look sturdier than an ox, I think we can make this work." He chuckled at Horror's flustered confusion. "It'll do ya some good."

Erratum had mentioned before to the farmer the entirety of Horror's situation and their belief that he needed reintegration. Currently, the other was much more animalistic than a monster, and perhaps interacting and relearning some skills would do him well. The farmer appeared up for the challenge, which was a silent relief to them. Horror shot a desperate look at Erratum and the other could practically read his mind.

"I have no issues transferring you back and forth every day. I understand your want to remain in your world to protect your brother, and for your 'boss' to be able to find you." Horror looked a bit relieved at this, confirming Erratum's suspicions. **"You'll be good for Farmer Sans, right? No hunting the livestock, no eating the crops out of the ground."** They listed, to which the monster nodded frantically.

"Can do it..." Horror assured them while the farmer look only slightly worried by the needed guidelines. "Won't... disappoint."

"I know you won't, but don't torture yourself trying to do everything perfectly. It will take some time to adjust." Erratum glanced around and nodded firmly as they felt satisfied with the situation. **"At any rate, I should be off. I never know when I'll be called away next."**

"You take care of yerself, ya hear?" Farmer Sans instructed them with a pointed look. Erratum gave him a thumbs up before splitting a portal open again and allowing Cross to leave first. "See ya a little later then I guess." He waved as the god disappeared back to their plane. His eyes locked on Horror again, who stood up straighter at the continued appraising look. "Now then, where should we start?"

Just as Cross had promised, he had practically become Erratum's shadow for the next couple of weeks.

No matter where the god went, Cross followed them diligently and was more than willing to put his life on the line to protect them. Erratum had several problems with this and more than a few concerns about the implications it carried. They had decided early on, however, that if Cross was so persistent, then Erratum would use that to their advantage.

"You want me to fight you," Cross spoke the statement dryly rather than questioned. Erratum nodded their head once to show that is, indeed, what they wanted. "Why exactly is that?"

"With these newer abilities and constant danger I am in, I feel it's necessary to begin properly training myself for combat. While my strings and rope dart are all perfectly fine and well, the continuous emergence of these magical abilities demands more refined training." Erratum did their best to explain while their screens popped in and out of existence. They could see the hesitation in his eyelights however. **"I wouldn't ask if I weren't positive you would make sure you didn't push too hard."** They continued to try and persuade him. **"Come on, Applesauce-"**

"*DON'T,*" Cross gritted his teeth tightly, making the other pause quickly. "Don't call me that." He spoke through clenched teeth. Erratum was usually very accommodating and understanding of what the others asked of them.

However...

"Come over here and *make* me, Applesauce."

It wasn't too hard to get him on board with the idea after that. In fact, Erratum was certain he got enjoyment trying to strike the infuriating god while they grinned and continued to tease him.

At some point, even Geno got involved. Erratum suspected the other felt left out and had suggested the other tag team with Cross every so often during a spar. Geno focused on magic and long-range while Cross was close combat and physical. All in all, it turned out to be extremely successful in refining their skills and magic into doing what they wanted without having to put much thought into it.

Which couldn't have come at a better time.

It was during a warm-up to their planned sparring session that they received a pleading cry in their mind. They looked up sharply from where they were meditating as they focused on the familiar voice.

"Little Light,"

"What's up?" Cross questioned at the faint whisper the other gave. He quickly noticed their 'listening' posture, however, and deduced what was going on. "Gotcha, where we dropping?" He questioned as he slid his jacket back on.

"Guess we'll see." Erratum replied as their strings parted the world once more. They stared on with surprise as they were met with nothing. **"Strange... it's very similar to the situation I had getting to you, Geno."** Said monster perked up a bit at this statement.

"Well... what'd you do to get to me then?"

"I managed to find a backdoor to slip through in my control menu."

"Oh, then just have Verse do it." Erratum furrowed their brow bone and turned slightly to give him an odd look.

"Excuse me?"

"Verse, ya know," Cross gestured with his hands in front of himself.

"You named the Multiverse..."

"Verse!" Geno grinned, causing the task menu to pop open in front of the god with a pleased ":D" displayed on its screen. "They seemed pretty fine with it."

And everyone got on *them* for *their* name choice. Erratum felt a little spurned.

"I can't begin to tell you how strange that is, but far be it from me to stifle your creativity." Erratum shrugged as they began to tap away on "Verse". **"Either way, he's calling me from a world I can't access easily, which gives me a feeling of dread."** They admitted with a frown. Cross moved beside them, unable to quite sling his arm around their shoulders and settling for a playful punch on their arm.

"Whatever it is, we can handle it just fine," Cross assured them with a smug grin. "Unless you're going soft on us now, Errata? Have we successfully depleted your power through all these fights?"

"You wish," Erratum smirked as the world finally opened to them. **"There, that was a bit of a pain, but I can hopefully open access back up once we're there so this won't happen again."** They gave a small wave to Geno before hopping through the portal. Erratum landed squarely on a strange, almost floating island surrounded by... paper? They weren't really sure what they were looking at.

"Um... how did you get in here?"

Erratum felt chills spread over their bones as they stood up from their crouched position. Blue was standing with his group only a few feet away, looking distressed and clinging onto Dream's cape.

Ink was staring right at them.

"Errata!" Dream grinned as he held his fist to his chest. He looked at Ink expectantly, nudging him hard a moment after. The artist gave him a bewildered look and crossed his arms tightly with a pout.

"What? I didn't do anything!"

"*Exactly!"* Dream hissed quietly back at him, gesturing to the fist on his chest. "You're being disrespectful!" He chastised him, to which Ink rolled their changing eyelights and waved him off.

Erratum didn't care much for the whole proper diety greeting, but the knowledge that the other was being *intentionally* disrespectful did burn them a bit.

"Even Nightmare at least has the courtesy to greet me before trying to manipulate me." Dream winced harshly at this and looked down while Ink laughed in amusement.

"Whatever, you're uh..." Ink glanced back at Dream momentarily, having already forgotten what the other had called them. He remembered the gist of it and decided to take a stab in the dark. "Uh, Error, right?" The creator grinned brightly, meanwhile, Dream looked mortified, and Blue felt secondhand offense. "You're the one who's been poking into all the universes, right?" His grin seemed to lessen into a more patient smile. "And somehow broke into my Doodlesphere? Which kind of annoying and shouldn't be possible? Sheesh, kind of rude isn't it?"

Oh yeah, they weren't going to get along.

"***Errata,***" The god emphasized as a violent set of glitches rolled up their arms a moment. "**Do not call me anything other than that, creator.**" They instructed with a clipped tone. It wasn't much longer before Cross landed beside them with a huff.

"Sorry, got distracted by-" He trailed off as he saw Ink, wincing internally. "Woof... this is awkward." He muttered as he looked between the god and demi-god a few times. He gave a weak wave over at the other two Stars, who both looked uncomfortable as well.

Erratum was ready to figure out the issue and leave when windows began to pop up all around them frantically. They stared at them in surprise, all of them displaying a warning sign and beeping frantically at them. They touched their fingertips to their temporal bone and a smaller blue screen appeared as a transparent blue square over one eye. The crosshair shifted around a bit before locking onto a sketchbook Ink was clutching, beeping frantically, and attaching tags onto the image to display information.

"Okay, that's pretty cool." Ink admitted with a fascinated expression. "What's it do? Are you like a computer? What AU are you from? Did I make you? I don't think I did, or at least I don't remember doing it, though that's not really all that surprising." The creator continued to ramble off.

"Ink, Errata is a *Guardian.* You did not make a *god.*" Dream spoke with barely restrained frustration at his behaviour. He shouldn't have been surprised, but it didn't make it any less painful to watch. To their credit, Erratum was doing an excellent job at ignoring him. Which only spurred the artist on further; he *despised* being ignored.

"What's Verse got?" Cross questioned, electing to ignore the group too as Erratum read something unseeable to him. Cross assumed it had something to do with the digital eyepiece that was currently covering part of their vision. After so long with the god, he was able to notice the small shifts in their expressions, so they judged based on that.

And boy, they did *not* look too pleased.

"What is it that you have there." It wasn't phrased as a question, something most of them noticed.

Ink, however, seemed pleased as he held up the book. "Oh, this? It's my sketchbook! I tend to doodle a lot, kind of my thing, but this is where all my big ideas go! Mainly for AUs I have in the works. I've got one that I've almost completely finished, just need to start the legwork on it!" He declared proudly. Erratum turned their eyes onto Blue, who looked pained at the topic. They instantly knew that this call had to be about that.

They didn't really bother to ask as their strings shot out and grasped the book in question. Ink, caught off guard, could only give an annoyed shout as it slipped from his hand and zipped over to the god. Erratum continued to ignore him as they flipped the page open and simply stared. They couldn't do anything *but* stare, their calm waters thoroughly disturbed and rippling with rising outrage. Dream seemed to notice as he hitched his breath and backed off a bit.

"What... is this?" Erratum sounded both disgusted and horrified as they never took their eyes from it. The voices in their head began to fall away as a pulse like a drum began to echo in their head. Never, in all of their centuries, had they been so... *angry*.

"Oh, you could have just asked." Ink frowned a bit with an annoyed expression. "It's based on two other universes I've already made. I decided it would be interesting to mix them together and change the story a little bit." He seemed rather proud of this, much to Erratum's continued disgust.

"I call it Horrorswap."

Erratum knew *exactly* why they were here.

Looking down at the image, they could see the mixture of the two worlds before them. Their selfless Little Light, the rough and struggling Horror. Both of them combined together to be placed into a new world of suffering, famine, of pain. They saw their two followers on this page.

"**No.**" The golden markings on their face became brighter as tears began to travel down the worn-down trail.

Ink frowned with a confused expression. "No what? No..?" He looked back at his two friends, further puzzled seeing that they had backed *far* away from the creator at this point. "Am I missing something here?"

"Dude..." Cross spoke with disbelief, taking the book from Erratum's slack hands and looking over it. "This is... *so* messed up." He muttered at the sketches of these twisted and feral monsters.

"**This world will not be made.**" Erratum clarified as they pulled themselves together enough to meet his eye again. "**It's sick and twisted. How *dare* you even *consider* creating such suffering. And for what? Amusement? Curiosity?**" They *needed* to know why. They *had* to. "**And you allow this? You, Spirit of Positivity, stand idle while these worlds are made? Have you no shame? Have you no moral?**" They were blown away at this. "**You fight Nightmare to push back negativity, yet you're *watching it* be made! How could you possibly push all of that blame onto him when you are at fault as well??**"

Dream, for his part, looked ashamed of himself. He kept his head lowered as golden tears spilled down over his cheeks as well, his arms wrapping around himself in a self hug. Blue did give him a pitying look and comforted him, but the look he gave Erratum assured the god he understood why they were doing this.

"Okay, okay." Ink held his hands up to attempt to deescalate everything. "Let's not get crazy here, Dream is certainly no Nightmare."

"I've heard the apple doesn't fall too far from the tree." Dream winced even harder at this.

"Hey, leave him alone! He hasn't done anything!" Ink growled as a red crosshair appeared within his eye as well. "Sit on your high and mighty throne all you want, but just stay out of our way." He threatened the other. "I'm going to make this world and it's going to be a great story! Who's gonna stop me from doing that? Who could oppose me over my own job?"

Erratum frowned sharply as they took a step forward and pulled their hand up to their eye. The fresh tears wound around their fingers as sharp threads in a familiar fashion. Their body shifted to an offensive stance as they stared the demi-god down. They didn't breathe a word, and Ink looked shocked.

"You?"

The artist withdrew their large paintbrush from their back and gripped it tightly. Both eyelights settled on Erratum as they took a quick sip from a red vial they produced.

"Hm, I've never fought a god before, so at least it'll be fun." Ink gave a

splitting grin as black ink dripped from his mouth. "I'm not usually one for destroying a creation, but I guess exceptions must be made!"

"Hit me with all you've got, creator."

Chapter End Notes

Cliffhangers, they're fun, ain't they?
Erratum's cheating using no-clip. Erratum does not hate nor blame Dream for all of this, by the way. They know Dream was practically groomed to be Ink's perfect and positive little companion. They just angee.

Also, Farmer Sans; a wonderful boy. Good wholesome boy.

Chapter 13: Clash of Deities

Chapter Summary

The inevitable confrontation between Ink and Erratum goes exactly the way everyone thought it would.

Chapter Notes

Hoo boy. I stared at my writing program for probably ten minutes trying to figure out how to start this.

Feel free to listen to the same song I was listening to while writing the fighting. I think it makes it exciting, lol. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HLG-T26hVTU

Enjoy

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Erratum was thankful their firewall held up firm in the face of the creator's paint assault. It did make it momentarily hard to see as the splatter of colours obstructed their field of vision. Thankfully, warning windows popped around them and alerted them of the approaching threat. They swiftly threw themselves to the side, narrowly dodging the oversized paintbrush as it split the ground where they had been standing. The god briefly wondered if the other had any care whether he killed them or not, but decided not to linger too heavily on that.

"Ink! Stop!" Blue shouted from the sidelines, a bit intimidated to get involved. Ink was his friend and teammate, but Erratum was his god. Erratum answered his plea for help and was currently fighting, perhaps not solely for him anymore, but to keep Ink from creating a world of suffering. He couldn't possibly fight against Erratum for that, but he didn't think it would be wise to oppose Ink either.

"Cross," Said guard perked his head up at the call. **"Stay with the**

other two. Make sure they do *not* get involved, am I clear? You are to remain with them and protect them from any stray attacks. I do not believe the creator will care much if there are bystanders." They gave Cross a quick glance before seeing him vanish in a teleport. Satisfied with his compliance, they dropped their splattered wall and saw Ink impatiently waiting for them.

"You done? A bit careless to start a conversation in the middle of a battle." Ink remarked as he clenched tightly to the brush.

"So is having your shoes untied."

Ink blinked as he looked down at his feet in confusion. "Hey wait, I don't wear-!" He was cut off as a beam of energy slammed into his chest and knocked them backward. Erratum huffed out a faint breath of amusement despite the situation.

"Made you look."

Ink recovered much quicker than any other opponent Erratum had faced in the past, almost immediately on his feet again and back in Erratum's space. The god had to dodge strikes from the large brush, each swing fueled by the artificial rage in his system.

"You're a slippery one, I'll give you that!" Ink hissed as he swung in an arch to cut off any retreat they could have. Erratum pixeled out, however, and vanished, leaving the brush to pass through a cloud of glitches. A few feet back, the god reformed from the ground up in a mess of codes and pixels before taking on a solid form once more. They were still getting used to the sensation of being broken down into their basic components and being put back together again, but it beat having their skull caved in.

"So cool...!" Blue whispered, earning a distressed look from Dream. "I don't like them fighting, don't get me wrong! But... come on!" He gestured to the clashing deities a ways away from them.

"Blue, there is a Guardian and a demi-god fighting in the middle of the Doodlesphere!" Dream exclaimed as he sidestepped a careless splashback of paint from the battlefield. "They're going to destroy something if they keep fighting!" He was terrified that one wrong move could cause a ripple effect that destroyed worlds nearby. Cross frowned sharply at this as he placed two fingers in his mouth and whistled loudly.

"Hey, you two!" He shouted as he got their attention. "Take it outside, you're gonna trash the place!" Ink seemed to realize this as he slapped a hand on his forehead.

"Duh! Can't have you destroying any of the worlds here!"

"***Me?!"*** Erratum hissed, offended as they gestured around to the mess of paint splattered around the area. "**You remain the only one endangering the multiverse, *as usual.*"** They snapped as they rushed the artist in a full-body tackle, the both of them disappearing through a rift the other had made. Cross took off in a full sprint toward the rift before diving in himself. Blue was quick to follow after him, with Dream forced to tail after them as well.

Ink found himself with his back pressed into the ground as Erratum planted their knee firmly against his chest. Ink growled as he twisted around until he was able to bring his foot up to kick them square in the chest. Erratum grunted as they were shoved backward a few feet and freed the artist. Ink sneered before dissolving into a mess of ink and reforming a few feet away. He looked around and felt an icy chill down his spine at the white abyss around them. "What is..? Where is this? Why are we here?" He demanded, trying not to let his rising fear show. Erratum frowned sharply as the three others arrived soon behind them.

"This," Erratum gestured around the vacant area. **"Is where I found Cross. A hardworking soul and loyal, to a fault."** They gave the guard a sympathetic look as the other stared at the blank space with a faraway expression. **"Why was this universe's path destruction? Why did the set course lead to a single monster, tormented by what had happened, trapped in endless white space? Where were you? Or better yet, *why*. Why did you *make* the world that way?"** They continued to press for answers. They had to know with complete certainty that he did this maliciously before they'd allow themselves to give in to that burning disgust.

Cross's head jerked back up as he heard this. "Yeah... yeah!" He gritted his teeth as his weapon was summoned into his hand. "Why?? You... you *made* me this way!" He realized with horror. "You created me knowing what I was going to go through. You... you created my universe, you *made* this happen!" He felt Dream gripping onto his arm, trying to discourage him from lashing out. "I didn't ask to be made! Was my world a game to you? A fun little show until you got bored?!" He demanded.

"Not every world can be happy!" Ink snapped back at this.

"Perhaps so, but they also don't have to be this cruel." Erratum shot back immediately. **"Tragedy happens, negativity must exist in the world for it to exist. In every universe, there lives a balance between positive and negative."** They used the artist's indignant rage to determine that his guard was slightly down. **"That's why we don't need *you* to make worlds made only of anguish!"** They shouted as their strings shot out toward the creator. Ink startled a bit as they passed through his ribcage and out the back, leaving him with a cold burning feeling in the emptiness of his chest cavity. Erratum stood there a moment with confusion as the strings tangled into his ribs instead. Then it dawned on them.

"That's right... no soul." Erratum frowned as they clenched their hand tightly to squeeze the strings tighter to Ink's body. **"Would have**

made this easier, but I've been known to do things the hard way too." They relented.

"What do they mean, Ink?"

Erratum paused at the soft voice. They turned their head as Dream stepped cautiously beside them and held his hands to his chest anxiously. With their focus redirected, Erratum could sense the disbelief and rising terror within the other. This discovery would have to go on the back burner for now, however, as Dream stared directly at Ink.

"Ink... you don't have a soul?" Blue questioned from beside Cross, sounding stunned at this information.

"I'm not surprised you haven't told anyone." Erratum spoke with distaste as they slowly dragged the artist forward with their strings, much like a fisherman reeling in their catch. **"Do you worry what they would think if they knew you could simply pick how you wanted to feel? How you can decide to not feel sad, or anger, or fear, just by not taking a swig from their vials?"** They pressed him further as Ink gripped at the strings in an attempt to break their hold.

"Is that true?!" Dream cried out as he took another step forward. "Ink, is that true? You... you can't feel emotions? You don't have a soul?" He couldn't quite wrap his mind around that. He had always had issues reading Ink's emotions, but he had assumed it was due to his status as a demi-god. After meeting Erratum, however, and being able to sense them just fine, he had begun to have his doubts.

"What difference does it make?" Ink snapped as he dug his heels into the ground to resist the tight pull. "Now if you're not gonna help me then take Blue and just *leave!* I can handle this myself!"

"Can we just *not* fight?" Dream redirected the conversation toward negotiation as he looked between them. "Maybe we *don't* make another world of starving monsters based off our friend's world?? I think that's a good start!" He attempted with a strained grin.

"Who's side are you on?!" Ink demanded as his enraged eyelights locked onto Dream.

"The *multiverse's!"* Dream exclaimed in exasperation. Erratum's console menu popped up beside the spirit, displaying a simple "**:/**" on the transparent screen.

"I'm serious!" Dream protested at the unspoken doubt. "I'm entirely for keeping the multiverse from falling apart and, of course, *minimizing the amount of negativity.* In case you've forgotten what my job is, Ink!" He called out to him.

"What *is* your job, Dream?"

The spirit clenched his eyes closed a moment at the direct question. He could feel the Guardian's stare boring into the side of his skull as they waited for his answer. Dream took a steadying breath before opening his eyes again and meeting Ink's outraged stare.

"To keep positivity equally balanced with negativity; no more than negativity, no less than." He spoke confidently. He could feel a hand at the top of his head but didn't turn their eyes from Ink.

"What are you saying, Dream? No more, no less? You don't want there to be more positivity than negativity in the world?" Ink questioned in bewilderment. "I thought that was your whole thing? Bringing

positivity to the world to vanquish negativity?" He scoffed with a glare. "What do you hope to gain then? What do you really want out of all your efforts if not to make the multiverse a better place??"

"*I just want my brother!"* Dream cried out in frustration, tears dotting at the corners of his sockets as Ink fell silent. "That's all I've *ever* wanted, but that's not going to happen. So, the next best thing I can do is continue to keep our balance in check so the multiverse doesn't collapse!" He shouted. "It's never been about what *I* want Ink! It's about what I *have* to do!" He clenched his fists tighter in front of himself. "What I was *made* to do..."

"As much as I love seeing character growth, I believe we were in the middle of something here." Erratum cut in, sensing the rising tension and conflict between the two beings. They used their leverage to lift Ink entirely off the ground with their strings. **"I don't want to keep fighting you, creator. I only ask you to yield and abandon this awful world you've created in your mind."** They could see the resolve set in Ink's face.

"Make me then."

Erratum had no issues with that.

They shook their head in disappointment as Ink's body slammed back into the ground with a harsh yank on the strings in their grasp. Ink spattered the ground with black ink as he choked and gasped for air. He managed to snag his brush from the ground, however, and send a searing streak of red paint hurdling toward the god. Erratum moved their other hand from Dream and pulled their firewall over the both of them quickly. The paint seemed to sizzle and bubble where it connected with their screen much like lava.

"Ink!!" Dream cried from the safety of the wall. "You would have hit

me too!" He felt his soul pulsing with terror as he stared at the thin wall separating him from the corrosive attack.

"Then get out of the way! You're not helping me so just leave, Dream! I don't want to hear your peace talk because I'm *not* gonna cave to some crazy monster with a Messiah complex!" Ink snapped as they were able to wriggle loose of the strings now that Erratum was focused on keeping their wall up.

"**It would be best to stay back with Cross and Blue.**" Erratum agreed as they gave Dream a sympathetic look. "**He doesn't care who he has to harm to get his way. Leave this to me, it is what *I* was created for.**" They assured the distressed spirit. Dream hesitated for a few moments, desperately wanting to somehow make the situation better. In the end, he conceded and fell back with the other two bystanders. Erratum was relieved by this, but was quickly alerted by the eyepiece of Ink's movements.

The artist had the nerve to start weaving together their idea in front of them. Their large brush moved in swipes to paint, starting off small as it began to expand with each stroke. Erratum noticed that if they focused, mainly with their eyepiece, the entire thing appeared as code to them.

They could work with that.

Erratum launched forward while the other swiftly retreated, paint following and forming a trail behind him. Erratum was able to reach their hand out and grasp the forming images of the paint, almost as if it were tangible. They could feel the buzz of binary and code in their hand and knew that they could manipulate this, or better yet, destroy it. Destroying it seemed like a waste, however, so they decided to try something a little different.

They absorbed it, consuming the data right before the artist's eyes.

Ink stared on with muted shock as the paint coalesced down from an image into a tight ball of unreadable lines to him. Erratum lifted it up and *consumed* their work. "What??" He sputtered as the god's magic flared brighter in response to the absorbed energy. "That's not possible... that shouldn't be possible!!" He shouted as the world around them remained a vast void of white.

"**Before your magic becomes a creation, it is merely basic components in the multiverse.**" Erratum explained as windows circled them once more. "**I can see and manipulate those components the same way I can the multiverse. If I wanted to, I could consume entire *worlds.* That would be cruel, however, and I refuse to take lives if I don't have to, let alone destroy a universe.**" They couldn't help but smirk as they walked forward and saw the artist take steps backward in response. "**It is cosmically hilarious, I suppose. I was supposed to be your counterpart to balance this multiverse. In the end, you wound up being both the creator *and* the destroyer.**"

"I don't destroy! I'm the reason this multiverse exists!"

"***The multiverse exists at the will of the Seven!***" Those same strings snatched the creator again in a tighter hold than last time. Electricity raced up and down them like livewires, causing Ink to cry out and writhe as they lifted him up. "**At any moment they could erase it all! They could start all over again and kill every single one of us! They *didn't,* because they are more merciful than that!**" They seemed to let go of their earlier hesitations as they slammed them around without relent. "**Your careless actions are the reason I'm even here! If you would have just *listened,* I wouldn't have been made! I would still have a home, existing peacefully as any other mortal did! You continue to fill this world, however, exponentially so to the point the fabric of reality is in danger!**" They huffed as they let Ink lie on the ground now, crumpled and leaking dark ink across the white floor.

"Your Karma, your punishment for all of this, is me." Erratum stated in a calmer tone as Ink tried to push himself up to his knees, only to collapse again. **"So, listen well, creator. You have to stop this. If you continue to create worlds at the rate you're going, the balance will begin to tip. There is only so much room in this plane of existence, and once it is filled, that's it. As you approach that, worlds become crowded around one another. Universes will collide with each other, and waves of destruction will come. All of the balances will be broken; life, death, positivity, negativity, creation, destruction... all of them in shambles. And with that comes the complete annihilation of the multiverse."** They were silent a moment as they allowed him to take this in.

"You think... I'm gonna listen to you?" Ink huffed out as he spat a clot of black sludge on the ground and scowled. "You're full of shit... I don't believe you. I don't know if you're just... jealous of me? Of the attention I get? But... I'm not gonna stop making things to satisfy *you*." Erratum gave a harsh laugh at this.

"You're delusional, but so be it." They raised their hand up once more.

"Errata, no!" They froze at the call, remaining perfectly still. Blue wrapped his arms around them from behind, pressing his forehead into their back. "That's enough... please. He's had enough." He begged them.

The god silently lowered their arm again at the plea, sighing heavily in resignation. The creator was pretty battered the way it is, they begrudgingly admitted. Blue quietly thanked them and let them go so they could approach Ink. The god stopped before him and crouched down, placing a hand on the back of his neck.

"I will be watching you. I may not be able to stop your creating

spree, but I can certainly oppose you when the worlds you make are so cruel." Erratum pulled their hand back as the symbol there pulsed a bit brighter with the added effect. They glanced over to their giant brush discarded at the artist's side and picked it up. They admired it a moment, squeezing it to test out its durability. Gripping either end of the brush, they raised it up before bringing it down over their knee.

The brush snapped in two in a mess of splinters.

"You bastard..." Ink coughed as the two pieces of his brush were tossed aside. Erratum didn't bother to respond to him and began to walk away.

"I'll tell everyone what you really are. I'll tell them all how you want to destroy future worlds from existing. No one will follow you after that, you won't go unopposed." He threatened them.

Erratum stopped in their tracks a moment, taking a calming breath to regather their calm aura. They only gave Ink a flat look over their shoulder to address him. "**I can't stop you from doing that, but I have Faith that those who know me won't believe you. And in my time dwelling among the worlds, that's a lot of people you'll have to convince.**" They left it at that as they returned to the three waiting skeletons. None of them had anything to say, unsure of what they *could* say.

"Are you...?"

"**I'm fine,**" Erratum assured Dream with a wave of their hand. "**I would suggest you tend to your friend, however. I was a little... heated.**" They admitted.

"Heated? Dude, you were the entire fire." Cross chuckled as he moved to pat Erratum on the back. "You feel better now? After kicking Ink's ass?" He questioned them. Their grin fell as they saw the solemn look the other gave him.

"No... I never wanted it to go this way." Erratum opened their rift once more and quietly stepped through it. Cross understood the unspoken command and followed after them. **"I apologize for dragging all of you along in this mess. I will do my best to keep our conflict separate from the rest of the inhabitants of the multiverse."** Erratum apologized with a pained look in their eyes.

"No!" Erratum blinked in surprise at Blue's outburst. "I'm sorry, but as your most loyal and dedicated follower, I can't let you do this alone!" He declared.

"Exactly!" Cross called from behind Erratum.

"You speak of opposing your friend." Erratum reminded him with an uncertain frown. **"Are you certain you would be able to do that?"**

Blue lowered his head a bit as he clenched his eyes closed. "I...I don't *want* to... but I also don't know if I can keep working beside him. Seeing him do that... and being so callous to my feelings over the world he was making... it hurts." He admitted as he gave the god a pathetic look. "And you never do that to me. You don't make me feel like my emotions are stupid and you don't ignore me when I ask for help. You're more of a friend than he's ever been, and I get that now."

"Little Light," Erratum crooned sadly at his dejected speech. **"The creator does not possess a soul. He is unable to empathize and relate to other monsters because of this. It is nothing that you did, and it isn't because your feelings are invalid. This conflict**

between the two of us? This is nothing anyone else should involve themselves with. It is solely my responsibility."

"That's not gonna stop us, I hope you know." Cross chimed in as he jumped to try and see over their shoulder. "Move over a bit ya giant beanpole!" He griped. Erratum managed a small smile at this as they moved aside so Cross could lean through the portal himself. "Tell ya what, Blue. How about we meet up every so often and spar a bit? I feel like you could be a great fighter with some proper guidance. I *was* in the royal guard, ya know." He winked, much to Blue's excitement.

"You *were?!* Wowzer... that would be amazing!" Blue exclaimed with pure excitement. Erratum silently glared at Cross, knowing that he knew full well that Erratum was hard-pressed to deny their little follower's most enthusiastic desires. Cross merely grinned back at them without any remorse.

"Fine... I will see to it that you are able to visit from time to time. I only ask you to not start a conflict with the creator yourself; it will only end poorly." After receiving a firm nod of agreement, they sighed and moved to close their tear in reality. They paused a moment later, frowning in thought. "**Dream?**"

"Y-yeah?" The spirit stammered at being addressed. The god gave him a look full of sadness and shared anguish, causing Dream's own soul to squeeze painfully.

"We'll figure something out... somehow... we'll figure something out for your brother. Hold me to that promise."

"Okay..." Dream whispered as he held himself in a self hug once more and stared pointedly at the floor.

"I hate to cut this short, but I have someone else I need to transfer back to their own universe." Erratum apologized. **"You know how to reach me."** With that, the rift closed between them. The remaining two skeletons stood their quietly, each of them pondering over their separate internal conflicts.

"Well," Blue sighed as he led Dream along with a careful hand on his shoulder. "Let's go patch up Ink... can't have him bleeding out all over the floor..."

"They've been like that for *days* now though!"

Geno frowned as he continued his argument with Cross. It had been a few days since the entire confrontation with Ink and the god hadn't done much more than sit at their altar and *stare.* Even now, the other was sitting propped up against one of the columns, running a hand absently over the recovering Temmie as they snoozed away in their lap.

"Look I'm worried too, but there isn't much we can do. That whole thing with Ink really took a lot out of them, mentally speaking." Cross sighed as he rubbed the back of his neck. "They don't even say anything during our group talks anymore... what makes you think we can get them to open up about it? We already know *why* they have this issue with Ink, and it's not like they don't have a right to feel like shit after what happened."

"I know, and I'm not asking for them to spill their guts about their feelings or whatever, just for some normalcy!" Geno paused as he considered that. "Well... whatever *our* normalcy was at least. Nothing about this is normal." Geno frowned as he sat on the ground and

thought. "I'm not sure how to go about it though. I'm kind of a fuck up on my own so I'm not sure any pep talk I'd give would be met with any enthusiasm."

The two of them continued to bounce ideas back and forth until a darker swirling portal appeared a ways away. Reaper floated through before it closed behind him again and immediately hovered near Erratum curiously.

"Sheesh, who died?" The demi-god joked with a slightly morbid grin. Geno gave him a harsh glare that drove home the point that now was *not* the time. Reaper, for once, seemed to understand this as he backed off his playful persona. "Rough couple of days?"

"You could say so."

"Mhmm, Ink held a council meeting. He looked pretty roughed up during the entire thing, which I guess was your doing." Reaper informed, to which Erratum simply closed their eyes and continued to pet the monster in their lap. "Don't look so glum, pal. He tried to start some witchhunt, but Blue and Dream opposed him. It got really uncomfortable in that room, I'll tell you what. I've never heard such words come out of Swap's mouth, heh." He laughed a bit, which did bring a small smile to the god's face. "Once the rest of us heard what the conflict was *really* about, the whole notion was shot down. Those who you've helped before spoke how they would have expected you to fight against that. Even those who haven't directly met you were vocal in their disapproval at Ink's actions. There were a couple of tense questions about why he needed to make these morbid worlds, but it was all masterfully dodged." He recounted with a chuckle. "So, no need to be all gloomy about it. No one really blames you for what happened."

"I blame me."

"Yeah, a couple of them said that too." Reaper agreed with a nod. "That you would take all that blame on yourself, that is. Very righteous god of you." He teased them.

Erratum relented with a small huff, finally looking up at Reaper with a tired expression. "**I suppose that isn't what you came here for?**"

"Only partially," Reaper agreed with a proud grin. "Admittedly, it's also for a more personal announcement. I've finally mastered the whole death aura thing." He seemed pleased with himself as he made this announcement.

"**I'm happy to hear that. I could really use some good news.**" Erratum admitted with a brighter smile this time. "**Show me?**" They didn't have to insist much as Reaper landed perfectly on the ground in front of them. None of the grass wilted, and even a long stroke of the grass with his hand left no traces of dead foliage. "**Excellent, truly excellent.**"

"Yup, I haven't tried it on a living being of course. Just... hard to do that final test in case I somehow failed." Reaper admitted with an uncertain frown. Erratum's eyes zeroed in on the two monsters that had approached when Reaper had arrived.

"**I'm confident in your abilities, and you will never know fully until you try.**" Erratum insisted. "**I'm certain Geno would be happy to volunteer.**"

"I would what?"

Reaper grinned a bit as he redirected his gaze onto the confused Geno. "Oh? I would be *so* grateful." He stated as Geno gave Erratum a timid look.

"Reaper has mastered turning his touch of death on and off. He just needs to simply touch a mortal to prove it without a shadow of a doubt." They explained.

"You want me to be a guinea pig??" Geno sputtered with disbelief.

"What's the matter?" Reaper teased as he held his hand up. "You came here not knowing if you'd live or die, right? Afraid to flirt with death a little more?"

Geno flushed brightly as he gave him an outraged hiss. "Fine! Whatever, at least if you kill me I won't have to hear this anymore." He huffed.

"Wonderful." Reaper grinned as he stood in front of him.

Geno lost his indignant stance as he lifted his hand up nervously. He glanced back over at Erratum again, who only gave him a thumbs up in response. Reaper stood there patiently with his own hand held up as if waiting for a high-five. Geno cursed softly under his breath as his hand shakily reached out for him. His hand hesitated briefly just before their fingertips touched, tremors wracking his entire body now. Finally, he bit the bullet and pressed his entire palm up against his and closed his eyes.

Nothing happened.

Geno slowly peeked one eye open, seeing his hand fully intact. After confirming he was definitely not dead or dusting, he fully opened his eyes again and stared at their hands. He looked up at Reaper, seeing the faint glow of a single light in one socket.

"See? That wasn't so bad, was it?" The demi-god spoke in a hushed voice as if any louder would break the atmosphere of the moment. Geno couldn't fight the small smile that made its way onto his face as neither moved their hand away.

"Yeah... I guess not."

Erratum sat nearby at their altar, watching the two of them with a strong feeling of pride. They had both come quite a long way from where they began. Cross slipped in beside them and lounged on one of the stone stairs of their altar.

"Yup... they're entirely hopeless," Cross announced softly to the god, who huffed a quiet laugh back. "Seriously though, it's frustrating to watch them. Almost painful."

"I don't think it will be quite the same now." Erratum replied, a small frown gracing their face again as they watched the two curl their fingers together.

"I don't think *anything* will be quite the same..."

Chapter End Notes

I couldn't help but throw some soft fluff in at the end.

Also, ya'll some bloodthirsty people. The amount of comments demanding Ink pay with his blood is *hysterical* and also slightly alarming.

Chapter 14: Fragments

Chapter Summary

A look back to the council meeting after Ink's conflict shows exactly how loyal they are to the creator. Back in Erratum's plane, they have a shocking discovery and a rather... colourful intruder.

Chapter Notes

Hello once more, it is I, the emotionally exhausted author. I had a few people interested in the events that transpired in the few days Erratum went sad solemn mode. So, I've decided to add some little sections here to address some plot-type things while being able to go back into those scenes.

Enjoy

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"There better be a good reason fer this shit." Red snarled as he slumped in his seat and crossed his arms. He cast his sour gaze out among the gathered group, seeing them all equally as uninformed as himself. "Does anyone even know *why* we had to have some emergent meeting? I figured if it were so important he'd already *be* here."

"Relax, that's them now," Outer spoke as the gold light of Dream's portal lit up the front of the room. He quickly got to his feet, however, as the positive spirit helped Ink stumble and limp into the room. Blue followed behind them quietly, keeping his eyes from meeting anyone else's.

"Stars, what happened to you?!" Sci gasped as the rest of the council broke out into frantic chatter.

"That glitchy little asshole happened to me." Ink sneered as he leaned against the table to prop himself up. Blue frowned sharply as he slammed his hands on the table beside him.

"Do *not* talk about Errata that way!" Blue snapped at him despite the glare it earned. "Don't give me that look, you know *exactly* why this happened!"

"Shit, Errata did that to you? Man, what'd you do to piss them off?" Red snickered as he observed the tense atmosphere between all three of the Stars. Dream might not be saying anything, but the discomfort in his posture spoke louder volumes.

"*Me?!"* Ink protested as he glared Red down. "You're just going to assume I provoked this kind of assault?"

"Yeah," Reaper spoke from his secluded little corner of the room. He didn't normally say much, but seeing Ink so beaten up from Erratum of all people amused him to no end. "We are. Errata is a really peaceful and chill god, Ink. If they felt the need to rough you up, there had to be a good reason behind it." He glanced around as he saw several other monsters nodding or whispering soft agreements.

Ink glared as he listened to the murmurs of doubt coming from the others. "Well, they certainly didn't have any 'chill' when they met me!" He growled as the noise died down. "What's worse, they were able to just break into the Doodleverse. *No one* should be able to get in there except me and anyone I bring!"

"To be fair,"

Ink glared at Dream as he spoke up, but the spirit wasn't looking at him still. "Errata quite literally has the multiverse at their fingertips.

At any moment they can access, well, *anything* that the multiverse can offer them. It's not surprising that they can just ignore the normal limitations of reality." He offered.

"Even so, they told me they had the power to consume entire worlds. They could destroy *any* of your worlds without so much as breaking a sweat. Do we *really* want someone with that kind of ability in a place where all of your worlds are just hanging out??" Ink attempted to redirect. A few monsters look back and forth at each other at this proposal until Outer gave a scoff of disapproval.

"I get what you're trying to say, but Errata isn't like that." Outer frowned as he glanced at Blue, who looked positively irate with the direction of this meeting. "They spend their time running themselves ragged answering prayers and pleas for help from all the universes. They're not gonna do anything to them. Hell, they've pushed back Nightmare's group every time they pop up anymore. You're worrying over nothing."

"Hell, I trust them more in the Doodlesphere than you," Red commented, shrugging a bit at the nervous glances he received. "What? We're all thinkin' it, I'm just not afraid t' say it."

Ink moved to grasp something at his back as the debate continued between the monsters. "You think they won't? You think they aren't a danger to any worlds?" He questioned them as the two broken ends of his paintbrush clanked against the table. The room fell silent again as everyone eyed the destroyed item. "This is what happened to Broomie when they saw me creating a new world. Broomie is durable and they split him in half like they were a twig. They threatened me to stop creating worlds and beat the crap out of me." This seemed to grab their attention again.

"That's *not* how that all went down!" Blue jumped in with an outraged expression. "*You* attacked Errata, Ink! You're the one who provoked them, and they didn't say they were going to fight you on creating

worlds, only oppose you when you make such *horrible* ones!" He still looked quite betrayed by the other.

"What *was* the world you were making?" The group immediately turned their heads to the original Sans, seeing the calculating look on his face. "I know Erratum, and I know their feelings on some of the worlds out there. So, tell us, what was so terrible that made them try and stop you?" He sat there quietly as the group waited to hear. Ink glanced over at Blue, who only gave him a sharp glare in response.

"Go on, tell them!" Blue demanded as he clenched his fists on the table. "Tell them how you were going to take my world and turn it into another Horrortale!"

"Why?!" Sans spluttered, truly shocked that the other had *really* attempted to make another version of such a terrible world.

"I woulda beat yer ass too!" Red shouted as he stood up from his seat, knocking his chair over. "I'll beat yer ass right now! You sadistic son of a bitch!" He threatened while Sans held both his shoulders to try and keep him from actually doing so.

"You know how hard on themselves they are for what happens in those worlds?" Outer spoke up again with a firm frown on his features. "They take *everything* personally and frankly, god or not, no one can live under all that pressure."

Sans nodded as he managed to wrestle Red back into his seat. "It's true. They didn't always have those gold marks on their face." He explained as he plopped back into his seat. "Once they discovered Horrortale for the first time, they realized how many bad worlds were out there. They kept finding them, worse and worse, and they wept over each one of them. Can't imagine what that kind of magic does to ya if just repeated exposure to your own tears corrodes your own

bones." He huffed out a small laugh. "They're probably also beating themselves up over having to fight you in the first place."

"How have *they* become the victim in this situation??" Ink grunted as he splinted his ribs with one arm. "I'm the one with the cracked ribs!"

"Ink, *you* did this to yourself! I'm the one who called them there in the first place because you were being entirely unreasonable!" Blue was nearly on the table at this point from leaning over into his face. "How could you even look me in the eye and tell me all the excruciating details about what you were planning to do to a twisted version of me and my brother? That's... I don't know how else to say it... that's extremely *fucked,* Ink." He flushed slightly in both outrage and embarrassment from using such language. "And then you have the nerve to stand up here and try and start some sort of mob mentality on someone who actually *listens* to me, all because you're acting like a little pissbaby?!"

Red was howling at this point, beating his fist into the table as he was unable to catch his breath. Reaper held his phone up from the back, recording the short interaction for future amusement and potential blackmail. The only person who looked even *slightly* mortified aside from Ink was Dream.

"Stars, that... was a little rude, I'll admit. I definitely didn't mean to devolve into such language but... you push me there Ink! You're so *frustrating!"* Blue growled as he finally pulled himself away from the artist and ran a hand over his face. Dream had been quiet until this point, but a nagging question kept clawing at the back of his mind.

"Ink... why *do* you keep making these worlds? The ones like Horrortale and Underworld..." Dream managed in a soft voice, not meeting his gaze still. "If keeping positivity balanced is my job in this place... why do you make my job so *difficult?* And for seemingly no reason at all?" He finally looked at him with a small glare himself. "At some point it makes me question your intentions." He admitted.

"He makes an awfully good point." Sans frowned as the calculating look reappeared. "You some kind of a freak? I get that it's unrealistic to believe that you can just create worlds that are perfect and all sunshine, but... you seem to be real comfortable making worlds on the opposite end of that spectrum."

"Kinda fucked up too." Red agreed as he wiped tears from the corners of his sockets. "I mean shit, my world could have been so much nicer. At the very least not so horrible that you can't even go outside without having to fear not coming back home. Ya ask me, I woulda been perfectly fine not existing if that were the other option." The room was uncomfortably quiet at this remark. The other was definitely skilled at finding the crudest way to say what others were thinking.

"You think only those of you with happier stories deserve to live?" Ink sneered at the accusations thrown his way. Dream gave a frustrated sigh at his statement.

"Ink that's *not* what we're saying at all. It's just... the ideas you come up with are kind of... messed up sometimes. I mean, what you did was kind of-"

Heartless.

Dream stiffened a bit as he subconsciously slid his gaze down to where Ink was splinting his ribs.

"Kind of *what,* Dream?" Ink's words held a sharp warning in them, one Dream heard clearly without even meeting his eyes. Dream clenched his fists tightly against his chest as he refused to give him the satisfaction of looking him in the eye.

"Nothing, Ink."

Everyone was silent now, unsure how to progress the meeting from this point. Everyone seemed to agree that Erratum wasn't a threat to anyone except potentially Ink, and even a majority of them silently thought he probably deserved it.

"Well," Reaper stretched a bit from the back of the room, growing bored now that the fun tension was delving into uncomfortable territory. "This has been a real treat, but my little Bleeding-heart Dove is probably waiting anxiously for me." He grinned mischievously as he gave a curl of a few of his fingers in dismissal. "Till the next disastrous meeting." He departed with that through a swirling portal of shadows. A few others began to mutter quiet excuses themselves before gradually getting up from the table and hurrying off from the meeting. Blue didn't even bother, turning on his heel and leaving swiftly with Dream.

Ink was left there to sulk and stew in his indignant rage.

"That's absolute *gold."* Cross laughed as Reaper held his phone up as the group of skeletons huddled near him.

"As much as I don't agree with provoking the creator, I have to

admit... it *is* a little funny." Erratum couldn't help but agree with a slightly exasperated expression. "**We should probably start those training sessions soon.**"

Nightmare had never understood the point of some of these universes. It was as if Ink just choose a random thought and decided to slap it on a canvas with little change to the original Undertale universe. Some were, admittedly, creative and perhaps almost unique, but other times they were just useless wastes of space. He was honestly doing them a favour by incorporating them into his kingdom.

He was beginning to grow annoyed, however, with how long it was taking to execute those who resisted his takeover. Killer was having no issues dusting the guards, and since this was a Dancetale world, there wasn't much pushback to their attacks. Horror had been left to cause fear and generalized negativity to feed his king, giving Nightmare even more power on the battlefield. One monster, however, was failing to meet Nightmare's high expectations.

"Dust!"

The crazed monster twitched slightly as he turned his head to look at Nightmare. The negative spirit gave him a deadly glare as he glanced at the citizen Dust had pinned to the ground. Nightmare *knew* he was holding back for some reason, and it only further fueled his rage. "Stop playing with your target and finish them." He commanded.

Dust's eyelights shrunk a bit, and Nightmare could feel the waves of anxiety and fear radiating from him. He narrowed his eyes at him, confused and irritated at his terror and hesitation. "That's an order!"

"But-"

Nightmare snarled as his tendrils raised above his head and sharpened to a thin point on each end. "Either you kill them this instant or I'll take your insubordination as a death wish!" He watched as Dust summoned a sharpened bone, holding it in both hands as they shook. "*NOW!*"

Dust squeezed his eyes closed as he plunged the bone into the soul of the defenseless monster. As they faded into dust, the murderous monster collapsed backward and cried out. He could feel the power leaving him again, numbers ticking away and stealing the magic stuffed greedily into his soul. He could feel a small twinge of something in his mind as their level dropped again.

Was this guilt? Shame?

He wasn't sure he even remembered what those felt like, but those seemed like the correct words.

Nightmare jolted with obvious surprise at the violent reaction, seeing how the other seemed sapped of his strength. He glanced up at the sound of blasters and a powerful wave energy battering at his being. Killer soon appeared from the fray, panting and covered in a layer of dust.

"Errata and their little pet are here." Nightmare cursed at this news. Horror lumbered over at a slower pace, looking to Nightmare for further directions at the change. They both glanced down at Dust with

confusion. "Geeze Dust, you get your ass handed to you by one of the little bunnies in town?" He snickered.

"Fall back, this world isn't worth it." Nightmare ordered the group as one tendril wrapped tightly around Dust. "This world isn't hard to overpower; there will be a next time once that pesky god is neutralized." He muttered darkly as he opened a portal. The group didn't question his judgment as they all hurried through the portal before Nightmare followed after. Once they were all securely in the halls of his manor, Nightmare dropped Dust to the floor unceremoniously.

"You better have an explanation for this."

Dust groaned as he pushed himself up and rubbed his fist into his chest, as though a sternum rub would relieve the ache within. "I can't-"

"You *will* tell me!" Nightmare cut him off sharply. "Don't you *dare* defy me! You have exactly *three seconds* to explain before I impale you through your useless skull!" He threatened him.

"It was Errata, okay?? Fuck, you're gonna kill me for this... literally." Dust cursed as he lowered his head in defeat. Nightmare grew silent as he waited for him to elaborate. "When I was having that bad magic flare, they showed up." He admitted shamefully to his leader.

"They were in my home and you did not *tell me?"* Nightmare hissed at the very thought. The very, very small rational part of his brain reminded him that the frenzy of such a rush of magic would have made him act in irrational, potentially stupid ways. "Continue, before I lose my patience."

"They gave some long-winded speech, the idiot. Gave me enough

room to deliver a good killing blow on 'em." Dust grinned momentarily before faltering again. "But... they didn't die. I'm not sure what they did, but they were alive. When I did it," He looked at his hands with terrified eyes. "When I gave that fatal blow... I lost levels. It was like they sucked it out of me. When they came back they... I don't know what they did. It was like a curse almost?" He tried to explain.

"What did they do?" Nightmare demanded, feeling a rising sense of alarm at this news.

"They said..." Dust clenched his eyes closed as he remembered the burning sensation down his arm. "They talked about Paps... told me he wasn't real, that it was in my head. Said it wasn't... right for retribution? Whatever the hell that means. So they took him away." He whispered the last bit as he mourned his brother for the first time in quite a while. "They said every life I take from then on would eat away at my levels and drain my power." He gave a dry laugh as he pressed his forehead down onto the dirty marble floor. "A large part of me was just hoping they were trying to intimidate me. Guess they really meant it..."

This was not good, this was *very* not good. Nightmare clenched his jaw tighter as his tendrils jerked and swished around restlessly as he thought. He recalled the large symbol on the back of the god's cloak and at the brow of their skull. "Karma... they must have originally been the champion of Karma before they became a full Guardian. They have the power to deliver punishment to those they deem guilty."

"Champion?" Horror was the one to speak up at this, trying to pass off his interest as simple confusion at the topic. After all, most of them still thought him a dumb mindless beast even with his newfound speech.

"Legends of the Guardians state that each being has the ability to

choose a champion to work through since they cannot directly interact with the multiverse." Nightmare scowled with distaste. "Or so it was *supposed* to be, seeing that one is currently running around and making my life difficult. Champions are imbibed with celestial magic and power that of which rivals any monster you could imagine. They also have the ability to contact their Guardian for guidance and assistance, though I have never actually witnessed any champions other than Ink in my lifetime."

"Ink's a champion?" Killer spoke up, just as thoroughly invested at this point.

"Yes, but of whom I am unaware. I doubt the clueless idiot knows either." Nightmare remarked with irritation at not knowing something so crucial. "He bears no mark that I can recognize other than the blotch on his face, which is not identifiable." He glanced down at Dust again, pondering what to do with him now that he knew of his 'issue' so to say. "You will still be expected to participate in sieges and raids, but I expect you to have enough restraint to keep your enemies alive. Dead monsters don't release negativity anyway, so I suppose this is something we can work to our advantage.

Dust lifted his head from the ground, staring at the spirit with disbelief. "M-My king?" He stammered with uncertainty. He had never been shown this kind of mercy before.

"*Don't.* Fail me again." Nightmare emphasized this with a sharp tendril tapping on the back of his skull. "Or your levels won't be the only thing you lose." With that, he retracted the tendrils into his back and began to head toward his office.

"You all are dismissed."

Erratum found it was easier to let go of their anger and guilt as the days went by and people continued to rally behind them. Seeing Cross and Blue sparring and Geno being huffy but gentle with Reaper was also a great soothing balm to their soul. They had been getting pings from Vers- *their command menu* whenever Ink was active in creation. They didn't have the energy or patience to stop his creating quite yet; there were still centuries before critical overload was projected according to their task menu. Thankfully, none of the universes he had started crafting were too vicious or cruel. Perhaps he had learned his lesson.

Fat chance.

Erratum jerked from their thoughts as several windows popped open around them with various warnings. They rested their hand over their control menu to identify the problem and immediately tensed up.

Ink was nearby. But how was that possible?

"**Take me there, please. Lead me to him.**" Erratum spoke to the screen below them as the windows slowly began to close. The screen stayed blank for them, causing the god to close their eyes with an impatient sigh. "**Please, *Verse,* guide me.**" They relented. The little screen displayed a pleased "**:D**" before displaying a map of sorts to guide them along. Erratum shook their head as they followed the projected path, scanning the area along the way. Nothing seemed out of place, and they hadn't sensed anyone entering their world.

Erratum stopped in their tracks as their console alerted them that they were within feet of the creator. They glanced around expectantly, but there was no one there. They glared down at the screen with confusion. "**Verse... you are an omnipotent entity with limitless power. Why do you use it to toy with me?**" They frowned as an arrow pointing downward displayed next to a rather unamused

expression on the screen. They furrowed their brow further in confusion before looking at the ground and scanning.

There, just ahead of them, they could see something.

It appeared like shattered glass and static to them with no discernable shape to it. Their eyepiece appeared before their socket as they crouched down to examine it closer. The code was broken up and confusing, but they were determined to figure out why this was pinging Ink to their menu. They placed their hand on one of the fragments and immediately heard whispers from the pieces. They closed their eyes and focused on the noise, allowing the images to come to their mind.

They could see what they only assumed was Ink, at least what he was in the beginning. They could see the moment Fate encompassed him with magic, the soul straining against it before rupturing and scattering like shrapnel around the area. Erratum gasped as their eyes flew open again, staring down at the piece below them.

This was a fragment of the creator's soul. The one that had destroyed itself during his creation.

It made sense, in a way. Ink was originally created in the white abyss that was once the anti-void. He had been left there for who knows how long until he finally mastered his powers of creation and learned how to travel into the plane where the universes would come to reside. Erratum had changed how the anti-void appeared in their own time within it, never once thinking about how Ink was once shaped in this plane.

Staring down at the soul fragments, it became chillingly clear that they were kneeling in the spot Ink had been formed. Erratum scooped a few pieces up with their hands, examining them and trying to push

them into place. It was hard to tell which pieces went where, and even when they managed to find what they believed was a good fit, the pieces seemed to repel each other like two positive pole magnets. Erratum felt frustrated at this; of course, it would be too easy to be able to restore a soul like this. Perhaps, though, if it was simply code, there would be a way for them to figure it out later?

"AYYY, YOOO!"

They jolted and nearly dropped the pieces in their hands at the unfamiliar shout. Their screen popped up again, alerting them that their antivirus had caught something. Erratum sighed heavily as they began shoving pieces to Verse's screen, which absorbed each piece greedily. **"Can I have one break today? At least a moment without a major crisis in my own home?"** They complained as they searched one last time for any pieces they may have missed. Satisfied, they quickly melted into the ground in a mess of pixels.

They reformed back at their altar, startling Geno who was lounging nearby in his golden sweater. "You're going to give me a soul attack one day, ya know." He complained. "You wondering about that screaming too?" He questioned. Cross appeared from behind the statue of the god, having been pillaging while the other was away.

Erratum nodded once as they tapped on their screen. **"I apparently snagged something, or someone I suppose, in my antivirus protection."** They explained as strings descended from the sky. They could see a strikingly colourful skeleton tangled in a mess of them, dangling before them as Erratum brought them down further.

"Ay bro, super unrad of ya. I'm just tryin' to see your crib here, you feel me?"

"Oh Guardians above, not *him*." Geno groaned with a roll of his eye.

"Fresh, how did you even get in here? You shouldn't be able to skate into a whole different plane of existence."

"My dude, how was I supposed to know? This place was givin' some rad powerful vibes." Fresh grinned as Erratum slowly let him go. "Sup my pixelated pal? Name's Fresh!" He greeted them with a pair of finger guns. Erratum gave him a strange look as they pulled them up on their screen curiously.

"Ah... you appear to be a parasitic-like virus I failed to destroy a while back." Erratum sighed heavily with annoyance. **"I see you've gotten stronger and... have begun claiming hosts."** They grimaced as the shades the other wore seemed to change to a series of exclamation points.

"Ayy, I 'member that! Wow, you really messed up lettin' me get free and grow like that." Fresh paused as he thought for a moment. "Yo does that make you my totally radtastic Pops then? Or... Ma? Parental figure?" He considered.

"That is not even close to how that works." Erratum groaned as they ran a hand over their face. **"Though it *is* my fault that you exist, so I suppose I have to take responsibility for this. Just... don't call me any of that."** They instructed him. Fresh gave them two thumbs up at this with no other comment. Cross held in a snort at the obvious irritation building in the god, though Geno appeared to be just as irritated with the monster.

"Cool, not a prob. I'd rather think of ya like a cool sibling. Like, a really, really, really older sibling." Erratum could feel the slight throb of a headache coming on. "At any rate, I seen what I needed to, so Imma skeedaddle now. See ya around!" Fresh grinned as he stood there, his shades changing to a couple of question marks. "Bruh... I totally can't Fresh poof out."

"Well, I'm not going to let you *leave.*" Erratum scoffed at the other's expression. **"You're a body-snatching virus, and since you're here because of me, you are going to *stay* with me then."**

"Aww, what! You can't ground me, that's totally bogus!" Fresh protested.

"Yeah! You can't keep him here??" Geno agreed with horror. "He's an absolute terror, Errata! He's going to be such a *pest."*

"The last person you said that about you-"

"Shut!" Geno flushed as he quickly cut Cross off, who only laughed in amusement at his flustered state. Geno nearly hissed as Fresh wrapped an arm around both Geno's and Cross's shoulders and grinned.

"Ay if we's gonna be roomies, we gotta get along, right? I ain't gonna bother ya... too much." Fresh promised with a menacing grin. Geno groaned with displeasure as Fresh began to ramble on in lingo that Erratum was still attempting to decipher. Cross just stood there and took it, more amused with the situation and new guest than annoyed.

Erratum was beginning to wonder how they continued to acquire all of these strange mortals in their realm.

Chapter End Notes

Lots of perspective and scene jumps, I know, but whatever. We got through it and it was as messy as I expected it to be. Lmao

Also, pissbaby is my absolute favourite insult to use. I caused a

man to ragequit a D&D session by calling him a little pissbaby.

Chapter 15: Lines are drawn

Chapter Summary

After a lecture regarding Erratum's lack of self-care, the god finds themselves once again proving their group of mortals right.

Chapter Notes

Hey it's ya non-binary boi, back at it again. I just finished three 12-hour night shifts in a row in the ICU at the hospital, so sorry this is a little late and/or if it's not a glorious chapter.
I would like to take this moment to address a few things that may not be clear regarding the gods and deities' etiquette, traditions, and laws.

-Lower deities greet the greater deities and gods/Guardians with a hand gesture to the chest to show respect and acknowledge their power. Not doing so is considered offensive and narcissistic. Generally, very insulting.
-Deities rarely attack other deities, it usually becomes messy. Most importantly, lower deities do not attack higher ones. Not only is it seen as lowkey suicidal, but it is also a general unspoken law of deities. Dream and Nightmare clash due to their troubled past, and Dream's motivation is to somehow restore his brother's sanity. This is a generally accepted fact.
-In terms of certain deities, Reaper cannot take souls that are not due to pass, and he cannot spare those that must be reaped. Life may use her powers to heal those on the brink of death, however, bringing back the dead is another forbidden act. Erratum cannot create worlds or rewrite them to their will and want. While they can dig through files and force run a story that is already made, they cannot make major changes to the world. While they CAN use their strings to pierce through the mind and experience that person's thoughts and past, this is not without repercussion after an extended period of time (that will be something that is explored later, hehehe).

-There is another situational power regarding Dream and Nightmare (which is a favourite of mine) in the sense that while they can exert auras to influence emotions, they can also siphon the positive and negative ones respective to their domain. This is generally not an acceptable thing, as it is seen as manipulative and a perversion of natural emotional balance. Nightmare doesn't

care about that, obviously.

I'm sure there's more I'm not thinking about at the moment, but here's just a starting guide for this. This hopefully can explain some behaviours and rationales for some of the motivations and actions of others that may be confusing. Feel free to ask questions though for clarification.

Enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Errata was finding that their patience was being tested on a daily basis now.

They were aware that Fresh was intentionally being as obnoxious as possible to get Erratum to release him, but that wasn't going to happen. They weren't sure how to fix the problem with Fresh, but they couldn't let them out to continue to cycle through bodies. The best they could do right now was keep him here so his stolen body stayed in stasis while they figured out a plan. They had way too many things on their plate and it was beginning to finally catch up with them.

"Yo my glitchtastic godly bro!" Erratum took a steadying breath as they opened their eyes. "Whatcha doin'?" He questioned as the rest of the residents gathered near the altar and settled down. Geno settled comfortably beside Reaper now, the other draping a wing gently around him.

"I don't know how else to describe it other than our daily therapy session." Geno offered as he absently ran his fingers over the black feathers. "It started off as Errata checking how we were adjusting to our new home, but dark and emotional stuff kept bubbling to the surface. Now it's become a time where we just sit and try not to be emotionally constipated anymore." He explained, to which Fresh gave

a perturbed expression.

"Dat's weird, but aight. Is hunger an emotion?"

"No, Fresh. Hunger is not an emotion." Cross informed with a raised brow bone.

"Then I got nothin'." Fresh shrugged as he sat on the ground near the group. "I'll just watch ya." He assured with a thumbs up. Erratum nodded once before glancing over to the group with a silent question. Everyone was quiet for a moment, not wanting to go first. Erratum sighed as they locked eyes with Cross, who squirmed a bit in place and looked away.

"I uh... I've been feeling kinda guilty lately." Cross started as they studied a blade of grass intently so as not to meet anyone's eyes.

Erratum had been suspecting there was something bothering the other for a bit now. "**Is this your thoughts, or *Chara's* thoughts?**"

It had been a struggle to decide what to do about that situation. While going through their to-do notes within their command console, they had realized they never removed Chara from the quarantine folder that they had essentially made in Cross's soul. They felt a bit bad about that, and in the end, after speaking with Cross, they had both reluctantly agreed to let the specter out. It was a little unfair to keep them locked up like that.

Chara was not happy when they were finally released.

"I mean, they don't *help*. They're certainly not here to boost my

confidence." Cross huffed. "But yeah... guilt. That's my biggest emotion I think."

"Why is that?" They questioned, giving him all the time he needed to gather his thoughts. Cross was quiet for a bit, pulling at the grass and considering his words.

"I feel like I should have done more during that fight," Cross admitted after around a minute of silence. "I know standing by and making sure the others didn't get involved was important but..." He frowned as his face scrunched up. Erratum tilted their head a bit at this, encouraging him to go on. "Fighting and defending... it's what I'm *good* at, you know?" He huffed out with frustration. "I've been trained hard to be an upstanding guard with impeccable reflexes and good battle strategy. I feel useless doing nothing."

"Useless?"

"I mean, it's like a dull knife, right?" Cross frowned as he leaned forward a bit and sighed. "A broken tool doesn't serve a purpose."

"Do you see yourself as a tool?" Erratum frowned as they considered this sentence. Cross looked sharply back at the ground again, answering them just as well as words would have. **"You do understand that you are more than just a tool, correct?"**

Cross gave another sound of annoyance as they glared at the ground. "I don't know, no? Maybe? I just want to be useful. I told you when I followed you that I could offer you protection, that I would fight by your side."

"Cross, first, take the therapy animal." Erratum instructed as the recovering, better-nourished Temmie was passed around to the guard.

Cross held the monster in his arms as it padded its paws on either side of his face repetitively. **"Second, you don't have to prove yourself to me, to anyone. You've shown that you're a strong fighter, a formidable mentor, and a dear friend."** Cross gave a crack of a smile at this, shaking his head a bit.

"What about you then?" He questioned, turning his head up finally to look at the god. Erratum tilted their head once again in further confusion. "Who are you trying to prove yourself to? Doing all of the things that you do?"

"I'm not certain I understand."

"Well," Cross sighed as he sat the Temmie down again. The small monster wobbled its way back to Erratum, who placed it back in their lap. "From what you've described, your job is to keep balance. That means trying to fix the emotional instability and the continued creativity problem. You focus a lot of your time on answering others' problems though instead. I'm not saying you're doing your job wrong, I certainly couldn't do any of this god stuff, but it's like... you are trying to prove something."

Erratum considered this, not taking too much offense as they dissected this question. They weren't certain if they were truly trying to prove anything to anyone, possibly themselves. They hummed as they ran a hand absently over Temmie. **"It might be the inherent pressure on my shoulders. Fate expects me to quell the creator, Karma expects me to deal out proper punishments, Hope and Faith expect me to answer prayers and help positivity? That part was a little unclear."** They listed off with a shrug. **"Perhaps I'm trying to prove my place as a Guardian? I've never given it any consideration, it simply is my job. I don't have time to consider why I do the things I do, I simply do them."** They gestured to the altar behind them a moment. **"These people all count on me to give them some sort of reprieve from the hand they've been dealt. I can't just stop now."**

Cross exhaled slowly as he took in this answer. "Yeah... that's pretty heavy. Man, I do *not* envy you. No wonder you're so glitchy all the time anymore." He commented, a series of pixels rolling over the god as they gave a surprised expression. "You've had to have noticed that, right? You're like... almost fizzling out at some points. You're pushing yourself waaaay too hard, and you expend a lot of magic nearly every day." He pointed out to them. He watched as the other tilted their head up in a listening position. "See? You're a workaholic. They survived years without you here, they can survive a few issues without you." He chided them.

"But-"

"Not during the daily meeting! No answering prayers during therapy!" Geno finalized with frustration. "Unless it is life-or-death, it can wait a little bit." He stated firmly while Reaper snickered beside him. "This is an intervention now."

"This isn't how this is supposed to work."

"I think this is *exactly* how this is supposed to work. The multiverse isn't going to fall apart if you take a few minutes to yourself." Geno disagreed as he crossed his arms firmly. "Have you ever even taken the time to just sit there and rest?"

"I sat and did nothing for hundreds of years."

"Okay fair... how about trying things you've not done before?" Geno suggested. "You've never done simple things like taking a nap! You're based on a Sans, so that should come naturally to you!" He insisted.

"I don't sleep, I have no need for it."

"Just because you don't *have to* doesn't mean you *can't*." Cross pointed out with a small frown. "I think it might even be healthy to try. Can't hurt, either way, right?" He suggested. Erratum released a heavy breath as they glanced around the gathered monsters. "You *know* we won't let it go."

"I'm *very* aware." Erratum assured with a weary expression. **"If it will satisfy your concerns, I will do it. I won't guarantee that I will actually rest, but I can certainly attempt it."**

"That's all we're really asking for," Cross assured.

"My dove is so caring." Reaper teased with a sly grin. Geno shoved the other, attempting to push him away off at this point in irritation. Reaper only grinned wider and wrapped both wings around him now stubbornly. "And shy."

"Someone else go, please. I don't like focusing on my own problems."

"Yeah, welcome to the club."

"Dirty viruses," Erratum snarled as they attempted to capture and destroy the malicious code plaguing the universe they had dropped into. They had taken several minutes to attempt to convince Cross that, no, they didn't need him to accompany for once. Erratum was

naturally an antivirus, and only they could properly kill off these annoyances before they got out of hand.

Fresh was slowly growing on them (like a parasite), but there was no need for repeats. They had to destroy them all.

Cross had refused to let them go alone again, however, especially after their last encounter. Erratum didn't have the time to argue the matter and simply left Geno in charge of Fresh. The parasite had learned early on from a brief attempt to graffiti their altar that Erratum, while merciful and patient, could be wrathful when pushed. They wouldn't hesitate to turn a blind eye to whatever Geno might wind up doing.

This Swapfell variant had screeched to a halt mid-genocide due to the numerous viruses crawling around the world's code. While most of the Underground was empty, there was no one progressing the story forward or backward. Erratum was certain the minute these were all squashed out, they could repair the little glitches and everything would continue as normal.

Now if only the little things weren't so fast.

Erratum had chased one all the way from Hotland back to Snowdin, much to their frustration. They assumed this had been the original malware considering the size of the squirming mass of pixels. Cross was confused by the entire process of watching Erratum capture and fry the balls of pixels in their hands, but he was supportive regardless. He had helped cut some off in the beginning to keep them from escaping the god's reach, but the larger ones were a bit trickier. Thus, it led them on a wild goose chase back to Snowdin. Cross was starting to wear down from all the running and athletics he was using to outsmart these things, but Erratum was fueled by spiteful determination.

"Hah... Underground's only so big... don't know why it's still trying." Cross panted as he stuck close to Erratum.

"Self-preservation. Its mind works in a primal, instinctive way to remain alive and produce more viruses." Erratum answered, never taking their eyes off of the fleeing malware. **"Which is why they need to be eliminated. They will continue to consume and produce more viruses until the world is unstable and full of them. Then, the universe will collapse and all the viruses that survive will pour out to infect new ones."**

"So," Cross attempted between huffs of air. "A lot like... a real virus in the body? Hijacking cells until they rupture?"

"Precisely."

Erratum was hot on this thing's tail, ready to grab it at any moment. Sadly, being so focused on this virus made them a bit tunnel-visioned to everything else in the environment.

"What the fuck is that thing?!"

"Errata-!" Cross attempted to warn them as the god continued after the virus. The god ignored him, barreling through the group of monsters with little thought.

"Pardon me!" They managed to call before diving after and grasping onto the virus. They gave a triumphant laugh as the mass screeched and writhed within their hand to try and escape. They pushed themselves up to their feet again, still grasping tightly onto the virus. **"My apologies, I wasn't quite-"**

The group of murderous skeletons stared back at them with a mixture of befuddlement and annoyance. Killer and Horror were both sprawled out in the snow, Killer on his stomach and Horror flat on his bottom. Dust was standing a bit away from the downed monsters, staring at Erratum with what the other could only assume was bloodlust.

"The hell you doing here?!" Killer hissed at the god with disgust. Cross carefully circled around the group back to Erratum, keeping a hold of his glowing blade as a visible threat. The one good thing with having released Chara is the power that seemed to bleed over into the skeleton. It made him an even stronger partner to fight alongside.

"**I'm working, what are *you* doing?**" Erratum spoke with a sigh, as though speaking to a child bothering them at their job. They glanced up as a golden portal appeared and even more skeletons appear in the abandoned town of Snowdin. "**Can I please just do my job?**" The god closed their eyes momentarily as they squeezed the virus tighter, the ley lines up their arms igniting before the virus was consumed by a shock of magic and exploded.

"Ew," Dream cringed at the sight that immediately greeted him upon arriving. "Um... what's going on here? Errata?" He frowned in confusion as his fist moved in his usual greeting. Ink was annoyed though as he spotted the god.

"Working with Nightmare's group now? Are you the one messing up this world?" Ink snapped as he leaned against his brush, which Erratum noted didn't have a scratch on it. Blue narrowed his eyes at Ink but said nothing as he waited for Erratum to explain.

"**We do not work together, and no. I came here to eradicate the viruses disrupting this world.**" Erratum explained as Verse blipped open and the god tapped away on it. "**That should have been the last of them. Now, again, what are you all doing?**" They glanced up at the group of (mostly) hostile skeletons. Before any of them could

answer, the door to the local shop swung open with a harsh slam. Nighmare took in the scene before him and focused first on Erratum, and then zeroing in on Dream.

"What are you doing in my territory?" Nightmare growled as his tendrils lashed out angrily. "This is a part of *my* kingdom, Dream!" He reminded the other harshly. Dream hardened his expression as the other addressed him.

"You mean the territory that you enslaved?" Dream replied coldly.

"*Please,* you think everyone is on the side of light? This world welcomed me with open arms." Nightmare grinned viciously at the look on Dream's face. "You're the ones trespassing on my grounds."

"These worlds don't belong to you!" Ink snapped at the other's claim. "The people here have their own lives and story to live, you shouldn't be interfering!" Ink looked over as he heard Erratum mumble something under their breath. "You got something to say, Error?" That got the god's attention, who snapped their head up immediately with a glare.

"Do *not* disrespect me, creator. You can call me Errata like everyone else or you can keep your mouth closed." Erratum spoke sharply. They noticed Nightmare seemed to take interest in their dispute, which Erratum feared could mean nothing good. They certainly didn't want him to get the idea that they were somehow *against* the Stars in general. **"Now can all of you please leave so I can force reboot this world?"**

"We're gathering supplies, *you* leave!" Killer replied childishly at the request. Erratum rolled their eyelights with an irritated sigh.

"Could you quickly finish then and *then* leave?"

"Hey, don't encourage them to steal!" Ink protested immediately. Erratum gave the artist a confused look at this statement.

"This world is aligned with them and probably regularly runs supply trades with them already. Plus, this world is completely vacant right now. Everything is going to be replenished the moment I run the program again. It's not really hurting anyone if they gather medical supplies and whatever else they may need."

"It's aiding the enemy!"

"Call it whatever you want." Erratum shrugged as they closed Verse and glanced over the monsters. Neither group was fighting each other yet, so that was a positive in the situation at least. **"They still require food to live and medical supplies to heal themselves. It isn't like they can go to any world and gather them like many of us have the privilege to do."** Erratum kept their gaze on Dream as they spoke, attempting to appeal to his compassionate side. The spirit did frown and waver a bit, to his credit.

"They did this themselves! They're the only ones to blame for their actions!"

"Oh, don't go there Ink." Erratum narrowed their eyes at the creator with rising outrage. **"I could search the entire multiverse and still never discover where you find the *audacity*. As though you didn't create the worlds and storylines around you that led them here."** They shook their head as they glanced at Cross. **"I suspect this is going nowhere, we'll come back later and finish it."** They explained as they turned to create a portal out. **"The viruses are all gone, that was the most important part. Rebooting can be done-"**

They barely saw the window pop up with the warning sign in the split second they had to react.

The god came to an abrupt halt as a sickening CRACK pierced the air, followed by a blurring sensation of pain and agony against the back of their skull. Several gasps rang out as Erratum collapsed into the snow, dazed and dizzy from the impact on their skull. A hand reached up and gingerly touched the area, which was quickly saturated in marrow by the time they pulled it back.

"Wow, I thought you were way smarter than that. Turning your back on an enemy?" Ink laughed, as though truly amused by the notion as he stood gripping onto his large brush. Cross recovered from his stunned position as he lashed out at Ink with his own blade. Ink blocked it with his brush, grinning at the guard impishly as the two pushed and struggled against one another.

"Ink!!" Dream shouted in disbelief at his actions. The god had been leaving and had done no harm to any of them, yet the other had struck them regardless. Blue looked beside himself in rage, not sure what to do with his body as he stared on in disbelief. Even the group of darker skeletons stared on with muted surprise at the sudden turn in events. Horror's fingers twitched a bit against the handle of their axe.

Cross managed to shove Ink backward after a drawn-out struggle, still feeling the exhaustion in his bones from the earlier chase. Ink merely swiped at him again but was pushed back by a shockwave as his brush collided with a transparent wall. Cross was knocked down from the force himself, looking over at Erratum in alarm. The god had their hand held out, still pulling themselves into a crouch as they protected Cross.

"Sheesh, you're still conscious?" Ink laughed as the other stumbled to their feet and glared. Erratum's vision was a tad blurry from the blow to the occipital part of the skull, but they weren't about to let that

show. "If you taught me anything from last time, it's to not let you get an advantage. Gotta take you by surprise."

"Cowardly," Erratum corrected with a small wince. **"Attacking somebody with their back turn."**

"You're gonna lecture me about battle etiquette?" Ink snorted with amusement as he shifted his brush into one hand. "I don't really care, you bleed all the same. Maybe next time you'll-" The artist jolted a bit before frowning in confusion, eyelights rapidly shifting.

"Not so fun on the other side, is it?"

Erratum squinted their eyes a bit to try and distinguish a bit more of what was going on, but Cross seemed completely aware.

"Holy shit, Blue."

The smaller Star member was stood firmly against Ink's back with a dark expression on their face. Ink glanced down at the front of his shirt, where a dark spot of ink was blooming against the fabric. He seemed more startled than in pain, trying to look over his shoulder.

"Did you just...?" Ink tried to connect the wires in his brain to confirm that, yes, that in fact just happened. "Did you just stab me?!"

"Daaaamn," Killer called out with a gleeful grin on his face. "This shit is better than any soap opera. Betrayal? Violence? It's got it all!" He commentated while the rest of the group stared on with immense interest. Nightmare took this time to begin to open his own portal, looking at his group with a small upturn of his head.

"You attacked my god when they were only helping this world. If you're going to force me to choose between them and you, then you're pretty much pushing my hand now." Blue bit out with frustration, emphasizing his point by giving a sharp twist of his blade before slipping it out again. Ink placed his hand over the black stain on his lower ribs, wincing a bit at the raw stinging sensation.

"So, you've made your choice then." Ink grunted as Dream frantically moved to his side. When he tried to assess and heal the wound, however, Ink shoved him aside roughly. Dream winced as he hit the snowy ground, sitting up and rubbing his shoulder with a pained sound.

Nightmare's tendrils twitched a bit.

"I guess I have," Blue replied as he moved to join Erratum's side with a concerned expression. "I can't handle your unpredictable behaviour Ink. One minute we're friends, and the next it's like I'm just some means to an end. I've had enough, but I can't say I didn't enjoy the better times we all had." He gave a sad smile at the artist, but the other just sneered at him in return.

"Fine. Don't expect me to show you any mercy then if you decide to fight alongside them." Ink warned him as he backed off finally. Blue didn't seem too phased by this and turned his head to the side, refusing to look at the creator anymore. Ink gave them all one last parting glare before disappearing in a vat of ink. Dream brushed the snow off of himself as he got back to his feet, turning his fretting onto Blue instead.

"I'm fine, it's fine," Blue assured as he grasped onto Dream's wrists gently and smiled. "Sorry, you got pulled into this mess. I don't think I'm going to be seeing you as often anymore." He spoke regretfully before sliding the small blade back up into his wrist holster to

properly hide it.

"**Nonsense,**" Erratum interjected as Cross steadied them a moment before letting them walk on their own. "**My plane is a neutral ground that you're both free to come and go within. Feel free to drop in as you please, everyone else does.**" They spoke with a shake of their head, but they didn't seem too annoyed by it if the smile said anything.

"Well, if you're sure." Dream agreed with a small sigh. "I'm so sorry about what happened. Let me heal you." He insisted after he finished fussing over Blue. Erratum was about to thank him for his compassion when another warning box popped beside him urgently. They looked up sharply as both arms swept out and shoved Cross to one side and the remaining two Stars to the other. They felt the wind punch out of them as the projectile tendril pierced clean through their chest and out the other side.

"ERRATA!" Blue cried out as he rushed to his feet. The god cringed and struggled weakly as they were lifted into the air by the offending appendage, putting further pressure onto the surrounding traumatized bone.

"Brother?! What are you doing??" Dream shouted with terror, eyes wide as he watched the darker spirit. "You can't-! Why would you?!" He couldn't fathom why his normally calculating and intelligent counterpart would do something so verboten, even by Nightmare's standards.

"I was never very good at following the laws, why start now?" Nightmare smirked back at him in response. All of the remaining members seemed to have already disappeared into the swirling portal behind Nightmare. "I tried the whole deity etiquette thing and now I've grown tired of the entire thing. Ink doesn't appear to care, why should I?" He stared at Dream pointedly, smugness radiating off of him.

"You don't want to do this!" Dream called out to him desperately.

"Don't tell me what I want!" Nightmare snarled as his shoulders raised instinctively with a glare. "Don't pretend you *ever* knew what I wanted!" Dream's protests died down a moment at this, wounded by the statement despite himself. Erratum moved their hands up to grasp tightly onto the tendril speared through them, sighing with momentary relief as the ooze bubbled away as it normally did. The relief didn't last long as they then fell from the air without the support of the tendril, hitting the ground limply and remaining prone. Their body screamed with agony and pain, practically begging them not to move from the spot on the ground.

"This has been a treat, truly. We should do it again sometime." Nightmare chuckled darkly as he disappeared into his portal before it vanished entirely. Dream broke into a full run and dropped to his knees beside Erratum, hands hovering over them a moment with terror. He wasn't sure where to even start. He felt frustrated tears pricking at his eyes for hesitating so much, glancing at Cross who was just as lost for what to do.

"Heal."

Both skeletons jumped at the rough voice. Dream blanched a bit as Horror towered over the three of them, unsure if he should try and heal the other or attack the monster above him. Cross seemed less alarmed though, furrowing his brows a bit. "Horror? Didn't you leave with everyone else?"

"No. Snuck away." Horror explained as he continued to bore into Dream with his intense eyelight.

"**H e a l.**"

"Right, right! Got it! Right away!" Dream sputtered as his hands rested on the back of Erratum's head. "I can't believe he did that... Nightmare I can kind of understand, just a little bit, but..."

"Ink's a little prick is what he is." Cross spit as he helped shift Erratum around carefully so Dream could continue to heal them. "Errata has helped these universes tirelessly at the expense of their own health. They will answer call, after call, after call without a break, sometimes for days. They said they don't require sleep, but even so, I've caught them looking more worn down than usual on those bad days." He gave Erratum's face a pitying look as he turned them over to examine their chest. "And Ink sleeps soundly at night knowing he's made so many awful worlds out there. Places like Geno's, where he sat by himself for the longest time. Or mine, in a loop of self-destruction until everything ended."

"Or mine," Horror added in with a frown. "Hungry... everyone starving. Hurt."

Dream had an encroaching thought that made cold terror settle in his middle and his soul clench tightly. If that was the case...

Horror moved to lift the god up with surprising ease, his own body rather large for a Sans. Cross looked like he wanted to protest this, but Blue just touched Horror's arm reverently and smiled.

"If it means anything, Errata talks about you a lot. They really respect you as a friend." Blue assured him kindly. Horror stared down at the small being for a few moments curiously. He eventually gave a faint grin to show his delight at hearing this. "Now then, we need to get them home so they can rest and heal properly," Blue instructed as he looked at Dream. The other nodded as he created a portal into

Erratum's plane with some difficulty. Erratum had allowed him to come and go freely, but it was a bit more taxing to open a portal to an entire plane rather than a universe, and he had used quite a bit of magic already. He exhaled heavily as he gestured for everyone to go through.

"Horror, you should be able to pass through so long as you're holding them," Cross spoke as he entered the portal. "That's what they think, at least, after they brought home a Temmie from your world." Horror seemed perturbed by this but didn't question it. He simply passed through the portal into the world, marveling at the botanical wonder that it was. The air felt clean and the atmosphere unoppressive. Then again, it wasn't really surprising considering who he was talking about after all.

"Hey lovebirds!" Cross called out with his hands cupped around his mouth to project his voice. Geno was up in a larger tree, sitting upon a branch while Reaper sat beside him, wing draped over him as he spoke animatedly with his hands. Geno was watching him with fond amusement, a rare gentle expression on his face. The two were quickly startled from their moment at the call, Geno immediately flushing and ready to defend himself. His words died in his throat as he saw Horror carrying Erratum's limp and injured body. His eye lit up with magic immediately before Blue quickly jumped in to explain.

"Wait, wait! He's friendly!" Blue called up to the enraged couple above. "This wasn't him! Ink and Nightmare did this! Well... not together, or even at the same time. It's a long story!" He assured, watching as the both of them settled ever so slightly. Blue sighed in relief while Horror moved to where Erratum's altar was situated. He took a moment to admire it, examining the stonework and various items around it. He hummed as he looked to a basket settled at the bottom of the stone steps filled with fresh bread.

"I made that." He commented as he pulled at the various stitching materials and blankets to begin to make something on the grassy floor. It was a little difficult using one arm to support the god, but he managed it.

"You did?" Cross questioned in surprise as he tried to figure out what the other was doing. "I had some of it earlier today, it was really good. Where'd you learn to bake like that?" He inquired with curiosity. From what he knew, Horrortale was a devoid land with no food to spare for pleasantries such as pastries and baking.

"Farmer Sans," Horror explained as he finished what appeared to be some sort of makeshift nest-type bedding. "Errata... takes me there every day. Work for supplies... food and skills." He explained to the rest of the group slowly as he tried to form the explanation in his head. He was getting better, slowly, but the head wound was certainly not helping his language and speech comprehension.

"I knew this was gonna happen one day." Geno frowned as he came to stand beside Horror. "They keep pushing themselves and putting themselves into these situations. They're lucky you all were there and that this wasn't any worse." He looked to Reaper a moment as he said this, seeing the solemn look on his own face. Geno sighed as he pulled a blanket over Erratum's form and shook his head. "Well... at least they can finally take that nap."

They all backed off a bit after this, not wanting to hover over the Guardian while they were recovering. Fresh, curious about the whole debacle, decided to poke his head in from behind the group. He could tell everyone was giving off some pretty harsh vibes and wanted to see for himself. He glanced down at the wounded god, frowning a bit as he considered their slumbering form. They looked pretty injured, and everyone seemed to be anxious about it. He didn't really know how to relate to their emotions, but he tried to find the right things to say in the moment.

"Bummer."

No one appreciated his efforts.

Chapter End Notes

By the way, wanted to give a shoutout to everyone reading and commenting. I'm genuinely blown away by the response to this. It was solely a self-indulgent story that didn't have a great power balance as far as characters went, intentionally due to me wanting happy endings lol, that I decided to upload just because. I thought maybe like two or three people might get a kick out of it. But uh, over 5k reads is kind of wild to me.

All your comments and kudos really have made me feel so much better in the face of all the stuff I'm going through right now.

Also, can you tell I try so hard to not have to use the word tentacle? Lmao

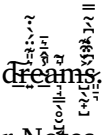
Chapter 16: Waking Nightmare

Chapter Summary

Wounded and unconscious from their last scuffle, Erratum dreams.

And dreams.

And dreams.



Chapter Notes

Back at it again trying to pretend my life problems aren't real. (Un)healthy escapism!

Everyone seemed excited about finally seeing Errtaum go down (you monsters /j). Don't worry though, there will be more balanced combat now that their adversaries, mainly Ink, see that they don't have to restrain their demi-god power on them. Some of you are also really good at catching subtleties in the writing. There will be things expanded upon, don't you worry c:

Enjoy

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Sans?"

Sans groaned as they opened their eyes, finding themselves face down on the carpeted floor. Sans felt befuddled as they tried to recall what led up to where they were now. What was going on?

"Did you forget to take your medicine again?? You know what Doctor Alphys said about taking your medicine on time!" Medicine? Sans was so confused by this conversation.

"I don't-" Sans paused as they heard their own voice. That didn't seem right, that didn't *sound* right. They couldn't place why, but their voice seemed... wrong. They turned their head up to respond to this person, only to freeze as they did.

The monster looked like a typical Papyrus, though they sported a comfortable hand-knitted sweater by the looks of it. What was most offputting, however, was the completely smooth face the other had.

No eye lights, no sockets, no mouth, *nothing.*

"Why are you looking at me like that? Is there something on my face?" The faceless Papyrus questioned them.

"Uhhh nope. No, not at all..." Sans muttered back with apprehension. They looked down at their own hands, seeing the tremors in their bones and the little plasters occasionally littered on their fingers.

"You need to use those thimble thingies!" Papyrus chimed in, making Sans flinch a bit. "And wear your glasses!! You'll stop poking yourself so much!"

Sans had so many questions they wanted to be answered, so much they needed to ask. They didn't have much time to do so as the ground under them began to shake violently. They inhaled sharply as a whisp of blinding white seemed to encompass them, their whole body burning at the contact. They could hear distant screams from the faceless Papyrus, but everything sounded as though there was cotton in their skull. A feeling of nausea overtook them as they were dragged

down, seeing the colour of their world fading into nothing but black.

They were floating, endlessly, with nothing around them. Sans-

No... No that wasn't their name, was it? Not anymore at least.

They cringed at the blinding light that seemed to surround them on all sides now within this void. A cry tore out of their throat as what felt like a set of two hands grasped them from either end. It was as though their entire being was being dipped into a vat of acid, slowly dissolving the bone away from them. Their soul felt heavy like it could burst at any moment as it greedily absorbed the influx of magic.

Back and forth, they grasped and pulled.

Burning ceased momentarily as they lost their grip, only to surge up immediately as they grabbed where they could. Agony pulsed as their mouth stayed parted in a silent scream, their voice having long left them.

How long had it been?

Minutes? Hours? Days?

...Years?

It felt like an eternity of struggling, of trying to keep their body from scattering into a million pieces. They wanted to scream out for help, but no words could make it through the empty screams they gave. A

sound buffeted against their skull, and it took them a moment to realize it was laughter. It slowly rose and swelled, until it was all they could hear.

"Interesting," They tried to look around, but all they could see was the indistinct shape of the beings of light. They could feel panic in their chest and the last threads of their sanity beginning to fade. They knew they couldn't hold out much longer before they broke or died, and they weren't sure which one they preferred.

It all abruptly ended a moment later, the pain having ebbed the longer the beings held them. Another being appeared, banishing away the two specters with their presence as they cupped the skeletal monster in their hands. The monster was soothed, feeling no more than a slight tingle at the added magic that was filtered into them. The light seemed to bother their eyes less, and they could nearly begin to make out a form in the shapeless magic.

"Your creation is also your worst nightmare? That's... *hilarious*." The voice within their mind began to laugh again, drawing their attention back to the void around them. The being of light had disappeared by the time they turned back around, leaving them in the dark. They tried to move, gain any sort of footing in this space they floated through. As soon as they felt solid ground under them, however, they felt something wrapping up their ankles.

"The power I gain from *your* terror? Absolutely addicting." The voice nearly purred as the monster was dragged downward by tendrils of tarry goop. The monster reached out as they sunk, trying to grasp for something to pull themselves out with. They managed to finally find the voice to scream as the thick substance surrounded them and flooded their mouth, cutting off their ability to breathe.

"*Errata."*

Erratum snapped their eyes open as they found themselves floating once more, though they felt more in control this time. They recognized their body, who they were, and who was before them now. They frowned sharply and narrowed their eyes dangerously at the amused being.

"**Nightmare. I suppose I shouldn't be as surprised as I am.**" Erratum seethed quietly as the negative spirit observed their helpless position with a satisfied grin.

"I have waited for *ages* to get into your mind." Nightmare emphasized as tar began to wrap around Erratum again. "When I learned you didn't require sleep, I had given up on the idea I could infiltrate your dreams. Ink's rash actions gave me the *perfect* opportunity to make sure you were down for the count, however." He looked more than pleased with this revelation.

"**This is just a dream,**" Erratum grunted as they tilted their head away from the wandering tendrils. "**Your influence is nothing here. You aren't really here, and you can't harm me.**"

Nightmare laughed with malicious glee, shoving his hands into his pockets in a false appearance of casual relaxation. "Are you sure?" He questioned after he had calmed down. "Are you sure I can't? Is the pain that you have felt not been real? Has the emotional turmoil been a mere echo of the past, or is it raw and present?" He grinned at the expression on Erratum's face.

"**That's all temporary.**" Erratum responded as they refused to give in to his torment. "**When I wake, you'll be nothing but a memory.**"

"Oh, is that so?" Nightmare's grin sent a slight chill down the god's spine. "You think I'm going to let you go? You think I'm just going to let you wake from this living hell?" He chuckled darkly as Erratum let

this sink in. "I'll keep you here, for as long as it takes. If I have to torture you within your own mind for days, I will do so. I will *never* let you leave." He emphasized firmly, though the grin never strayed from his face. And Erratum believed him.

They *believed* he would keep them here as long as they needed to.

"How long do you think it's already been?" Nightmare questioned smugly as he fed on the anxiety and fear the other projected. "Time is meaningless in your mind. What seems like moments might have been hours. Hours may be days. How long do you think it would take before your little followers begin to break down?" He taunted the other. In a swirl of black mist, the forms of Geno and Cross became clear in front of Erratum. They both appeared confused and stared up at them with terror.

"Errata, please..." Cross begged the restrained god. "I can't be alone again. I can't be abandoned again." Erratum felt a painful clench in their soul, but it was nothing compared to witnessing Geno beside the fearful guard.

"You said you would help me..." Geno stood before them, bones bubbling and oozing from the determination in their body. "It hurts... you said you would make it stop. You would fix my world and give me my life back." He was becoming less solid the longer he spoke, making it hard to distinguish his words through the sizzling mess. "I trusted you... you're no better than him... toying with our lives and our feelings."

Erratum was thrashing from the hold on their body now, trying to lurch forward uselessly. "**I *will,* I *meant* that! This... this isn't real! You aren't here! This is in my mind!**" They shouted, clenching their eyes closed tightly to block out the sight. "**I would never turn my backs on you... I would never intentionally leave you.**"

"If I'm not real," Geno moved his hand from the wound on his chest, a thick paste of blood and liquid bone following in a stringy concoction. "Then why does the *pain* feel so *real?"* He whispered as he finally collapsed into a liquid puddle before fading into dust. Erratum felt their breath quicken at the sight, seeing the horrified look reflected on Cross's face as well. The guard turned to look at Erratum again, only to choke as one of Nightmare's tendrils pierced his chest and another wrapped firm around his throat.

"I'll destroy everything you hold dear, and I will kill everyone you love." Nightmare threatened as Cross clawed and struggled against the appendages. "Unless," His grip weakened a bit, allowing Cross to gasp and choke on the marrow pooling in his mouth. "You surrender yourself to me. Perhaps you could prove yourself trustworthy enough one day to be an asset, but for now, I will only accept your complete obedience." He narrowed his eyes as Erratum glared him down as well. "The choice is yours. Will you sacrifice yourself to save those you love?"

"I could never trust you to keep your word." Erratum spat back without hesitation. **"The only way to save them is for me to continue to rebel *against* you, not surrender myself *to* you."**

Nightmare gave a single chuckle at this, retightening his hold as Cross began to choke again. "You heard them, Cross. If your god's will is for you to die a martyr, then so be it." At these words, Cross seemed to grow quiet and compliant. He allowed his arms to fall away from the offending tendril as it continued to choke the life out of him. Erratum's breath hitched at the final look of dedicated respect the other gave before exploding into dust.

Erratum felt cold. They weren't sure if the numbness was any better than the horror they had been experiencing, but they were too far into their own mind to consider it. Nightmare seemed pleased, so their emotional state was obviously still beneficial to the spirit in some way.

"People are *weaknesses,* so easy to exploit." Nightmare commented as he patted himself off to remove the lingering dust from his clothes. "Letting people in leaves you vulnerable." He sneered with distaste as he appraised Erratum.

"I suppose you would know."

Nightmare narrowed his eyes a bit at their tone. "What are you implying?"

Erratum continued to stare him down, though there was a twinge of instability in their features. **"Don't forget, this is still my mind."** They remarked as a flash of gold revealed a group of skeletons standing before Nightmare. The darker spirit twitched as he recognized his subordinates, glaring at Erratum. **"You may attempt to put up a front, but I know better."** They muttered darkly as golden threads laced between each of their wrists before tying tightly around Nightmare's. **"If *I'm* vulnerable, what does that make you? I can protect my followers with every bit of my strength and hide them in an instant. Your own people are always out in the open, fighting for you and risking their lives. They are not hard to find."**

Nightmare opened his mouth to protest, but Erratum continued to speak.

"I have been in your manor, even before our game of chess. I have been with *every single one of them* before I met with you." Erratum watched as the tendrils on the spirit's back curled a bit inward. **"I am merciful, but you know very well that if I had wished it, they would be dead. And you would have been helpless to stop it."** They rubbed their wrists as they approached him. Nightmare realized now that through this exchange his tendrils had disappeared and released the god.

"**Your mask is slipping,**" Erratum commented as they grasped onto the threads linking the group together. Nightmare strained to remain standing as the dark group dropped to their knees at the pull. "**You pretend you aren't capable of feeling anything other than anger, hate, anything negative. You're just as attached as they are, whether you want to believe it or not.**" Nightmare tensed a bit as he noticed a blinding white colour encompassing Erratum's form once more.

"**I think you've forgotten who you once were.**"
"I think you've forgotten who you once were."

Nightmare shivered at the dual-toned voice, a mix of Erratum's blended with a gentler voice. Nightmare looked down at his hand attached to strings, breath hitching as the tar dripped away from it. They could see the white of their bones below it, mocking him with their presence. He tried to pull away from the tightened threads, but the familiar skeletons below him grasped the strings and pulled harder. Nightmare stumbled as they attempted to resist their pull, but eventually, they fell to their knees as well. They could see the sleeve of their old tunic now, cold dread settling low in their gut.

"**Do you fear they wouldn't respect you if they knew?**" Erratum didn't expand further on that, knowing they didn't have to. "**Do you fear that you aren't always the one in control? That you're just as vulnerable as any other person, deity or not? We all have weaknesses, some are just more exploitable than others. At least, looking at it from your point of view.**" They hummed as they felt the comforting presence of Karma around them. They weren't so certain this was just part of their dream anymore, it felt too tangible.

Nightmare looked up as Erratum stood over him, staring down at him with the light surrounding them. "**I could let the other Guardians take over from here regarding your transgressions.**" Nightmare tensed up at this prospect. "**I could leave you at their mercy.**" Nightmare winced as the light grew brighter a moment.

"But I won't."

Nightmare felt the intense heat retract a bit as the light reduced in brightness. Erratum stared down at the half-tarred monster in consideration. **"The question is what to do with you. I would almost say you punish yourself enough."** They sounded somehow sympathetic even through all of this, which only made Nightmare more enraged and more anxious. Erratum continued to process everything that had happened, trying to find an unbias way to go about this. Before they could even begin to plan something out, the being below them began to hiss and cringe.

"Dammit..." Nightmare hissed as a golden light began to tint the edges of the black void around them. "This isn't over, Errata. I'll be waiting for the next time you let your guard down." Nightmare vowed darkly before vanishing in a whisp of shadows. Erratum blinked as the landscape transformed fully, causing them to wince as the bright sun above shone down on them. They raised a hand to shield their eyes, trying to make out the landscape.

"Errata!"

Erratum gave a few hard blinks to adjust their eyes, seeing Dream rushing toward them. They frowned in confusion as Dream squeezed them in a tight hug and sighed with obvious relief. **"What's going on?"**

"You've been asleep for so long..!" Dream explained as he pulled back to look at the god. Dream looked exhausted with a clear darkening of the bones under his sockets. "Nightmare had been causing you terrible nightmares, but I couldn't break through his magic. He seemed very determined to keep you trapped in there with him and to keep me out. It took so long, but then there was a sudden lull in his magic and I was able to finally slip in."

"**Ah, yes, that tracks.**" Erratum nodded as they placed a hand on Dream's shoulder and guided him back to the tree. "**I suppose this is a sort of dreamscape then?**" They questioned as Dream leaned against the apple tree with an exhausted sigh.

"Yeah... me and Nighty used to meet here. We wouldn't so much sleep as we would fall into trances to enter this place. Through here we could travel within dreams and nightmares of the villagers to feed off their energy. It also helped us monitor them and intervene in the cases of extreme nightmares. Nighty would consume the dream and I would replace it. He got a good power boost and I expended some magic to gain a net profit from the added positive dreams." Dream kept his eyes closed as he described his past, a tired expression etched on his face.

"**That is fascinating.**" Erratum remarked with a tilt of their head. "**This is still something that you do, then?**"

"It's not easy," Dream sighed. "Nightmare was the one who could consume the bad dreams. I have to work much harder to change a nightmare to a good dream, and with how unbalanced positivity and negativity are, I usually gain no power from it." He opened his eyes a moment later, seeing Erratum standing a bit away from him. He looked over the black and gold features on them, sitting up abruptly.

"It was you..."

"**Hm?**"

Dream sat forward on his knees, scanning over Erratum once more with his eyes. "You're who I saw the day I was freed from the stone." He was certain of this the longer he stared at them. "I remember seeing a flash of black and blue... and a brief golden glow before it vanished. I couldn't make it out at the time... but it was you, wasn't it?"

Erratum was quiet for a moment as the other continued to look at them expectantly. Erratum settled down in front of him, crossing their legs and resting their hands on their knees. "**Yes... you're correct, it was me. I had come to check on your status when negativity began to severely outweigh positivity.**" They explained. "**I saw you were still in stone, but your eyes were leaking a gold liquid. It looked like tears, so I wiped them away. When I did, the stone began to crumble. I panicked and fled, knowing that I had interfered with your world. This was before I had begun the work that I do now.**"

"Ink... always told me he had come to rescue me." Dream went quiet for a moment, gathering his bearings with a shaky breath. "I... I need to ask something that's going to be hard to hear, I'm guessing. For me, not for you." Erratum sat quietly, waiting for him to continue. "Did..." Dream gave them a pleading stare as he gathered his courage. "Did Ink create my world? Did he... was he..." He stammered weakly, not wanting to say it. Erratum let out a long breath, closing their eyes as a pang of sympathy shot through their soul.

"**I think it's only fair you know the story of Dreamtale,**" Erratum agreed after a moment. Dream appeared confused by this.

"The story? But I already know the story, it was my world after all."

"**Not the story of your world, the story of how it came to be. The story of one of Ink's biggest mistakes, not that you all are mistakes, but you'll understand what I mean at the end.**" Erratum leaned back as they recounted this tale. "**Before Magic restricted Ink's creative magic, he created a world that balanced emotions. Ink doesn't have them, and I believe personally that he was attempting to understand them through this... experiment.**" They could see the wide-eyed horror on Dream's face, but they continued on without addressing it.

"**After you two were given your physical bodies and left to guard your mother, Ink continued to stay close by and observe you. Rather than letting your world grow and the story to develop, he took full control over it.**" Erratum couldn't meet Dream's eyes anymore, feeling the pulse of anguish. "**He found you interesting, Dream. He began to favour you and the bright positivity you brought to everyone. He began to see the quieter, more studious Nightmare as... boring, so to say.**" They cleared their throat to attempt to dismiss the feelings it brought with it. "**This... next part will be harder to hear.**" They warned Dream.

"**He understood the effects of the emotions you could bring, to an extent. He didn't seem to comprehend the need for negative emotions or what made them so important. So... he started to play with them to see what would happen. He influenced the story and began to influence negativity from the villagers to Nightmare, wondering what would happen if he pushed him. He wanted to know what intense negative emotions would make a person do.**" Dream's breath was hitching, and Erratum didn't have to look to know the other was crying. "**That's not the worst part...**" They spoke quietly, giving the other a moment to gather himself.

"**He... wanted to know what would happen if he pushed him to his limit. He wanted to know what desperation would make him do. He wanted to know what would happen if the other consumed the apples.**" Erratum was looking as far away from Dream as they possibly could without turning their back to him. "**Karma described it as a whispering voice to Nightmare, a voice that insisted if he showed he could care for the positive apples as well, they would love him as they loved you. That the hurt would stop. Obviously, that didn't happen, and the apples turned. When the villagers were overcome with negativity, he consumed them out of fear and desperation, just as Ink had wanted.**" Erratum chanced a glance back at him. "**You know how the rest of the story goes.**"

Dream was hunched over, hands clutching either side of his skull as his breaths came out in panicked gasps. Erratum knew the other

wouldn't take it well, but they also knew the other had a right to know. "**After this happened, Magic restricted Ink's creative powers to prevent him from causing further unbalance by creating deity-like beings. That's how Reapertale came to be; when a few of the Guardians created it to attempt damage control.**" Erratum sighed heavily as they gently touched the back of Dream's skull. "**And that's the story of Dreamtale. I'm sorry you had to hear it from me. It shouldn't be me having to explain it to you.**" They sharpened their expression a moment at this before softening it again as Dream looked up at them.

"H-he... he took everything from me..." Dream hiccupped with a heartbroken expression. "My brother... a..and he let me... and I fought beside him... I lost my best friend... because someone was bored. Because... they thought it'd be interesting to see everything fall apart." Dream let himself be guided to Erratum, pressing his face into their chest as he sobbed. He mourned the life they never got to have because the person they thought was their friend decided it wasn't exciting enough.

"**I know... I know it's horrible.**" Erratum murmured softly, unable to do much else to stop his hurt. They focused intensely for a moment, hoping they could somehow force their body to use their magic in their sleep. They gave a satisfied hum as golden light surrounded their palms as they held Dream and fed their magic into him. Hope and Faith wouldn't want Dream bleeding himself dry of positivity. "**We should wake up... it will be easier to talk about this with everyone else. Or... at least whoever is around right now.**" They insisted, to which Dream nodded weakly against their chest. He didn't say anything else, but Erratum could see the environment becoming fuzzier and less in focus. The last thing they saw before it all faded was the despondent face of Dream staring down at his hands.

"Ay, glitchmister's movin'."

"Move Fresh, they're waking up!"

"Someone get some water."

"Dream? Are you okay?"

Erratum blinked their eyes open, feeling fatigued weighing their bones down like lead. They could feel soft material around and under them, but they found themselves too exhausted to try and look around. They groaned weakly as Dream moved to sit them upright, supporting them with a hand on their back as Erratum slumped forward. "**How long..?**"

"It's been *three days,* Errata!" They grinned weakly at the distressed and worried voice of Geno. "We thought you were going to *die!* Don't you *ever* pull that shit again, you understand me?!" He continued to lecture as Erratum stood on wobbly legs and took a moment to regain their balance. "Are you even listening to me?!" He shouted as Erratum managed to move from the makeshift nest on the ground. They gave a relieved sigh and pulled Geno into a crushing hug, causing the other to give a grunt of surprise at the force. "Geeze... I missed you too, okay?" He muttered.

"No one buys that tough-guy stuff you do, you know that right?" Cross snickered from beside him. Erratum swung their arm out and yanked Cross in as well, holding tightly onto the both of them. Cross was equally confused now but placed a hand on their back regardless.

"Cool that you're not dead!" Fresh called out with a set of finger guns. "Dat woulda been a bummer." Erratum decided to that at face value.

"I guess I know what Nightmare used to torture you within your sleep." Dream spoke, still sitting in the plush material Erratum had been in. "He was always good at finding what brings the most terror out of you..." He seemed just as despondent as he had in the dreamscape. Both Cross and Geno gave each other a look from over either of Erratum's shoulders, feeling pity over what they must have seen happen to the both of them to cause this reaction. Erratum released them both after a moment, giving them a soft apology as the two mortals gave worried expressions.

"I've got water!" Erratum glanced up as Blue came running back with a bowl in his hands. He huffed out a few breaths as he stopped in front of the group, setting the bowl aside and holding tight onto Erratum now. "You're okay! I was so worried, we all were! You were out for so long... and you kept writhing and glowing in your sleep... we didn't know what to do. Dream was here for so long trying to get you to wake up, but then you both wouldn't wake up!" He looked up at them tearfully.

"I'm-" Erratum coughed, their throat dry and rough from lack of use. Blue quickly offered the bowl to him with a concerned look, giving the god a moment to quench their thirst before speaking again. **"I'm sorry that I worried all of you like that. It is my own fault for what happened."** They apologized as they handed the bowl back to Blue, who looked indignant.

"It wasn't your fault! Ink hit you in the back of the head! Then you kept us from getting skewered by Nightmare, you had nothing to do with all of that!" Blue protested as they tossed the bowl aside with outrage. "We all know who's at fault here, and it isn't you Errata," Blue assured them, wringing his hands together anxiously. "Reaper seemed... *really* upset when he heard what happened." He included with a frown.

"He said something about deity laws but didn't explain much else." Geno nodded with a confused frown. "Again, I'm guessing it's a god

thing."

"I'll explain it a bit later, hopefully with Dream's help. You seem more versed on diety law than myself." Erratum jolted a bit as their task menu popped up. **"I said *versed* not *Verse.*"** Erratum grumped before tensing up a moment. **"Wait... you said it's been three days?"** They seemed to just be realizing this.

"Oohhh, no you don't!" Geno immediately spoke up as he grabbed one of the god's arms. "The multiverse didn't explode the three days you were out. You don't need to go dashing off trying to do some kind of 'catch up' on prayers!" He chastised them. "Someone agree with me please!"

"He's right you know." Cross frowned as he grabbed their other arm insistently. "You're not gonna be much help to anyone if you pass out trying to move too quickly." Erratum frowned at the both of them, feeling slightly frustrated. "I know you feel restless doing nothing, but you have to heal. That's not negotiable."

"We won't let you leave!" Blue agreed, wrapping himself around one of their legs stubbornly. "You'll have to drag us with you!" He declared loudly. Fresh dropped himself over Erratum's back just to be a pest and keep them there as well. Erratum gave Dream a helpless look, but the spirit held his hands up.

"Don't look at me, I agree with them." He informed the disgruntled Guardian. "Either way, I need to go to Horrortale and inform Horror. He'll be really upset if we don't let him know Errata's okay. Cross? Would you mind accompanying me?" Dream requested, to which the guard straightened up immediately and nodded. "Thank you..." He gave Erratum a sad smile before opening a portal to Horrortale and allowing Cross through before following him.

"So," Geno started, pulling at Erratum insistently. Blue seemed to get the idea and quickly moved from Erratum's leg to their now free arm to help Geno pull them along. Fresh remained no help, being a roadblock even by adding even more weight to be dragged. Erratum gave a longwinded sigh as they were forced back into the makeshift bed of materials and blankets, half crushing Fresh. The other didn't seem to mind too much.

"You're gonna stay there until we say otherwise," Geno spoke with finality. Erratum no longer had the energy to protest and just nodded their head while Fresh squirmed to free himself from behind the Guardian. "Good. You better keep that promise." Erratum felt a jolt in their soul at this statement. Their mind went back to the melting Geno within their nightmare and their accusatory look before they died.

"I will... I promise I will."

Chapter End Notes

Gotta love some psychological torture, right?

Also, in regards to the Karma power stuff. It is one singular ability, not different magical abilities allowing them to do these things. They can impose *fair* punishments, which cycle through Karma as well. It goes through a system of checks and balances to ensure that it isn't too harsh. If it is deemed unjust, then the power will fail.

Chapter 17: Psychosis

Chapter Summary

After taking a look back at the breakdown of the council, a couple of skeletons briefly lose touch with reality.

Chapter Notes

Sorry it's been a bit longer than usual; I had surgery on the 6th and I've been down and out for a bit. I still can't hear very well and my throat hurts from being intubated, but we're all good!

ALSO?? https://www.deviantart.com/vcl2006/art/Errata-Erratum-915240499
AMAZING?? ARTWORK?? BY VLC2006?? I CRIED?? THEY PUT MY BABY IN A SUIT?? UGH

If any of yall make artwork or ANYTHING about this, I'll cry hardcore. This is the first fanart I've ever gotten and I wept. I'm so pathetic lmao. If you do make something, PLEASE share it! Either here or tumblr or wherever! I'll ugly cry.

Now... I've got a 12-hour night shift at the ICU tomorrow, the next day, and the next day, followed by an infusion of new medication at the hospital cause my old one gave me serum sickness. So... might be a week or so before an update? My bad.

Enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ink gave a glare at Blue from across the table, who met it equally while Dream stood at Ink's side nervously. The gathered council all seemed rather uncomfortable with the thick tension in the air.

"Didn't think you'd show up after you quit the Stars." Ink spoke up to Blue, causing visible shock to ripple through the gathered council. It was apparent there had been some sort of falling out, but no one expected it to be that severe. "How's being a backstabbing friend?"

"How's your chest?" Blue quipped back as he raised his head defiantly. "Probably better off than Errata's skull, no thanks to you." He huffed, drawing several eyes over to Ink immediately.

"What does he mean?" Outer questioned suspiciously. Ink opened his mouth to begin his long rant but was cut short as a swirling black portal deposited Reaper into the meeting room. Everyone knew the demi-god was rather quiet and had a dark sense of humor, never really causing many issues. The expression on his face, however, rivaled the deathly energy of his touch alone.

"Ink," Reaper started as he approached the other end of the table. "You've started something that I cannot be a part of, so I'll be bowing out of our alliance." He commented, which jolted Ink back into motion.

"What?? Why? What changed??" Ink sputtered as he tried to wrap his mind around this.

"*You* changed, or maybe it's because you *never* change." Reaper scowled darkly back at him. "You attacked a Guardian with their back turned that led to *severe* injuries to their person. I'm a deity, and I'm not gonna send a message to the higher beings that I stand behind you." He glanced at Dream a moment with a softer frown, yet still obviously enraged. "Any rational deity would do the same." Dream looked uncomfortable at this.

"Bruh, we talkin' about breaking deity laws?" Epic commented as he stood from his seat. "Yyyup, guess I'm outtie too." He sighed as he

pulled his hood up. Ink shot the zealous skeleton a befuddled expression. "You?" Ink questioned in confusion. "You're not a deity!"

Epic laughed a bit at this. "Nah bruh, I'm Magic's champion. I'm not gonna support this catastrophe, bruh."

"Wait, you're Magic's champion?!" Dream gasped in surprise. "But... you don't have a visible marking!"

"Eh, that's assumin' it's in a place you wanna see, bruh." Epic snickered at the embarrassed flush that brought to Dream's face. "Either way, Imma head out." He gave a thumbs-up before vanishing entirely in a teleport. Dream hoped he could find out a little more about that at a later time, but for now, he begrudgingly had this situation to deal with.

"Ink, I've respected the work you do keeping the multiverse in line and pushing Nightmare back, but I can't have your back on this one." Reaper informed him with a frown. Dream withdrew into himself a bit at the mentioning of Ink 'pushing back' Nightmare after making him what he was today. "I'm not gonna fight you either, I'm staying outside of this. If you two are gonna start some crazy god civil war, I don't want anything to do with it." He held his hands up at this while the group of skeletons looked between each other.

"Seriously?" Ink drawled with irritation on his face. "Oh, when *I* was all battered and bruised no one batted an eye. But I crack *one* skull and everyone loses their minds." He scoffed, which was followed by a small uproar as the council began to speak over each other.

"You did what?!" Outer gasped in horror. "Please, *please* tell me you at least have a reason? Even a stupid, horribly misguided one?" He begged the other, who just shrugged in response. "I saw an opportunity, I took it. Next time they'll think twice before turning

their back on me after intentionally trying to provoke me." Ink offered in response, which did nothing to quell the anxiety in Outer's gut. Blue slammed his fist onto the table and gathered the attention back over to him.

"*YOU* got angry, Ink! Errata said it didn't matter if Nightmare and his group took supplies from that broken world because they were going to reboot it. Everything would come back after that!" Blue argued with the artist. "So that just means we let the literal bad guys do whatever they want??" Ink shot back with equal amounts of rage. Most council members were attempting to shrink down into themselves further as if it would get them away from the uncomfortable confrontation.

"Errata wouldn't hurt them if they aren't hurting anyone else, and they make a good point! All of them still need to eat and be healed when they're hurt, and they can't go to anyone else!" He pointed out, trying through frustrated desperation to make the other just *see* what he was trying to say. "Who's fault is that?? They kill and torture people all over the multiverse, Blue! No one is going to aid a bunch of murderers and I don't want to be associated with anyone who does!" He looked around the group of uncomfortable group of Sanses, trying to gauge a response from them. Blue abruptly shot up out of his seat, ready to give them another verbal lashing.

"I don't know, Ink..."

The group looked over at Dream as he circled around the table to stand near Reaper. Said demi-god had been quietly watching the confrontation go down after having spearheaded the entire situation. Dream looked at Reaper a moment before gazing back at Ink with an exhausted expression. "I...I used to think they were all just evil or cruel monsters hurting others for their own personal gain, and for the most part that's true, but..." He clenched his teeth together to keep himself from falling apart. "But... what Errata said was true too, wasn't it? You... created the worlds, the storylines, the *bad guys,* Ink. They aren't cruel just because they suddenly feel like it, that's... that's how they were made. That's how *you* made them when you made their worlds." His eyes were teary, but he did his best not to let them pull away from the serious discussion they were having.

Blue stared on for a moment before slumping back down in his seat. "Exactly..." He muttered as he stared down at the table with frustration. "That's why Errata can't *stand you,* Ink. It isn't because people openly adore you, or because you have something they don't. It's because you take no consideration into the people you're hurting when you do these things! It's *exactly* like when you tried to make that horrible world based on mine!" He shouted at him with renewed outrage at the memory. "They *told you* that you're making too many worlds where suffering is the sole plot-driven experience! They *told you* that if you kept going the way you are that the multiverse is going to destabilize! Worlds vanquished in an instant!" Blue tried to drive it through his thick skull.

"Uh," Sci cleared his throat as he meekly attempted to speak up. "Can I... ask for further explanation on this whole 'destabilized multiverse' thing?" He requested nervously. Dream nodded as he allowed Blue to settle a moment and attempt to wrangle his rage in again. "Errata said that this plane of existence, where our multiverse lies, is not limitless. The closer we get to filling it with universes, the more at-risk universes come to colliding with each other. That would be... bad, as you can imagine. Mass extinctions of worlds leading to a tidal wave of destruction that would completely destroy the balance in the multiverse."

There was an uncomfortable silence that followed this before the original Sans got to his feet as well. "So," He started as he looked at Ink with an unreadable expression. "This something that just slipped your mind too? Shouldn't this have been something that comes up, oh I don't know, *way* before now?"

"If what Errata says is correct and there really is finite space," Sci spoke as he began jotting something down in a loose notepad. "Then, yeah, that would be... really bad. *Really,* really bad. End of the multiverse bad." He emphasized further. "That's what Errata said would happen." Dream frowned as he twisted his hands together. "They don't have to care either, you know." Dream added on after a moment of thought. "They don't exist in this plane, and it would make

no difference to them if ours completely ended. Other than they might get a little lonely." He gave a saddened smile at this.

"*No one,"* Ink started as he leaned against the table now to loom at the group. "Acts and does the things they do without some sort of ulterior motive, Dream. They're just trying to get into your head and convince you they know what's best for you." The positive guardian was at his limit as he took an aggressive step toward him. "And what does that make me then??" He demanded of him. "Are you saying all of the positivity and help I give is just... for some ulterior motive??"

"YES!"

Dream stumbled back a moment as if struck. Ink didn't seem too bothered by the visible distress on his face, however. "Dream, don't pretend you do all of this out of the *goodness of your soul.* You're driven by the naive belief that all of this will somehow lead you back to your brother. Everything you do isn't *really* for the betterment of the multiverse, hell half the time it isn't even for yourself! It's always been about Nightmare and you'll keep on this path as long as you think there's even the *slightest* chance that it will benefit your goal. I'm worried sometimes you'd turn against everyone else if it meant getting your brother back."

"That's not true!" Dream denied with fresh tears down his face now. "Maybe I do hope that I can somehow reach him, sure, but that's not why I do everything I do! That's not why I put up with *constantly* trying to stay positive so others can feed off me like a leech, Ink!" He shouted back at him. "Most people are only around me for the positivity I bring Ink, not because of who I am or what I do. And at *least,"* He emphasized heavily as he gave the other a pained expression. "*I* have a soul to try and do good by." He shook his head as he looked at Reaper, grasping onto his robe sleeve. Reaper seemed to get the memo as he opened his darker portal and led the distressed spirit through.

"How did he not die?" The Dancetale variant's question went without notice as everyone's focus was somewhere else.

Ink glanced at the council a bit nervously as all eyes were on them now. For once, he kind of wished they would forget he was even here.

"Wanna explain what that means?" Sans was still standing at the opposite head of the table, giving the artist an expectant look. "Let's put aside the weird gaslighting for a moment and the complete breakdown of what used to be our first line of multiverse defense. What was that last bit about?" He questioned Ink, who just gave a shrug with a sheepish grin.

Blue wasn't having any of that, getting sick of the number of times he's sat down only to jump to his feet again. "Be genuine for once Ink or *I'll* tell them!" He threatened the other, glowering back at him as the red crosshair in the artist's eyes met his. Ink sighed as he crossed his arms petulantly and rolled his eyelights. "*Fine,* okay. I don't have a soul. There, are you happy?"

"What... do you mean?" Sci questioned as he pushed his glasses up and stared at the artist. "Um... if you don't have a soul, how are you alive?" This only got a shrug in response, which further unsettled the scientist. "I just woke up like this, okay? With this sash to help me feel things." He tugged at the sash storing his vials of paint in them. Red inhaled sharply and tilted his head up with exasperation.

"Holy shit the person in charge of all of our worlds has no fuckin' *soul.* I always thought you just had a really dark and twisted sense o' humor." Red moved out of his own seat with a shake of his head. "Nope, no thank you! Nah, I think I'm gonna let Errata stay in charge of my universe, thank you very much." He quipped with finality before vanishing again. The original Sans didn't even say anything before teleporting himself out as well. Blue closed his eyes a moment before a tear in reality was made by golden strings, much to the

curiosity and wonder of those remaining. He gave Ink a nasty look before hopping into the rift before it vanished as well.

Erratum had found themselves on unofficial "PTO" due to their three-day slumber. They had argued it for nearly an hour with their followers before Dream brought Horror in to overpower the god's stubbornness. They were eventually forced to cave and now here they sat, up against their altar, with a tight frown on their face.

"It's not so bad!"

Erratum barely turned their head to give Dream a side-eyed glare. The positive spirit had been spending more time around the group after the incident. He made sure Erratum actually rested peacefully to speed their recovery, and he got a reprieve from his isolating thoughts. Ever since the explosive meeting with the council, he hadn't felt safe enough to stay in the Doodlesphere, nor did he feel safe enough alone in his own mind. "It's like... a mini-vacation?" He continued hopefully.

Erratum turned their head fully to view the spirit with a pitying expression. "**We're outside the multiverse, Dream. There is no positivity balance to be maintained here, so you can... stop...**" They gestured around Dream for a moment, trying to signal what they meant. "**Whatever this is. The guarded cheery mask to force yourself to be positive. Plus it's admittedly a little unsettling.**" They remarked at the aura that still battered at their magic from time to time.

Dream gave them a blank look before all at once seeming to deflate. "Oh, thank stars..." He sighed as he leaned into the altar himself and sulked. "Am I really that obvious?" He pouted at the other, who gave a huff of a laugh and began to knit. The movement of their hands helped quiet the sea of voices that had been swelling higher and

higher lately. "**To me you are, but that's because I know your whole story and can sense your emotions to an extent. I'm nowhere near the empath you are, but your aura is suffocating.**" Dream hung his head a moment with a defeated sigh. "Sorry about that..." He muttered shamefully, to which Erratum shook their head. "**I understand the necessity when the balance is the way it is.**"

Dream remained silent after that, not sure what else to talk about. He felt he might be bothering the god with his questions but they seemed openly receptive to conversation. He was pulled out of his thoughts as Reaper appeared from one of his portals, looking around quickly. Seeming satisfied, he floated his way over to the two lounging deities. "Hello Reaper," Dream greeted, raising a browbone at the anxious expression on his face. "Something the matter?"

Reaper shifted a bit as he looked from Dream to Erratum, who had sat down their project to give him their attention. "Well, there's something I wanted to talk about." He withdrew a larger lily from his robe once he did another quick glance around. The body of the flower was a glowing pure white with shades of soft pink brushed over the inside of the petals and darker pinks speckled about it. Dream gasped and sat up straighter as he looked it over. "I've never seen such a beautiful flower!" He admired. Reaper gave a flustered chuckle at this.

"Thanks, it came from Life's garden actually. It's called a stargazer lily." Reaper admitted as he looked over the plant fondly. "She was so happy for me when she saw I could touch her creations without causing them to die. I went to her for a favour and she was more than happy to help." He glanced up from the lily to see Dream's face shift to one of excitement. "I want to court Geno." Dream gave a soft squeak of a sound at this. "Ohh, that's so cute!" He cooed before turning to Erratum with a hopeful expression.

Erratum wasn't entirely sure of the significance here, but they had enough context clues to know this was about the demi-god's relationship with Geno. "**I'm sure he'll be touched by the gestured, even if he pretends not to be.**" The god assured with a hint of

amusement. Reaper perked up a bit at this and grinned. "So, I have your blessing?" Erratum was further confused by this as they tilted their head. "**Yes? Why wouldn't you?**" They replied, which seemed to satisfy Reaper enough as he floated off contently.

"I have a feeling you don't really understand all of this." Dream spoke, obviously enjoying the confusion the other had. "Courting is a sacred thing for deities; you're basically going through this whole process to eventually ask them to bond their soul with you." He explained with a soft, wistful sigh. "Before the monster gives their first courting gift and begins the whole process, they approach the family of the one they're courting to get their blessing to do so." Erratum hummed with interest, feeling the slightest bit touched that they would be viewed in this important role. "I'm glad for them, they deserve each other. They're both kind of a mess too, so." He giggled. "Maybe they'll ask you to do the ceremony when the time comes."

Erratum thinks that would be nice, even if they weren't too sure what that would entail. It was sweet to know that they were able to help these two souls meet and be able to form such a strong connection with one another. They frowned after another moment of thought. "**I'm nearly finished with recovering Aftertale's story-**"

"Let's not talk about that right now."

Erratum could respect the other's want to focus on the positive for now. It wasn't as if Geno wouldn't be able to come back after it was all done and over with. Considering how it appeared to come to a resolution, the other might even be able to survive outside of timeless spaces. The pain and suffering they would have to put him back through, however, was something no one wanted to focus on. The more focused Erratum found themselves in these thoughts, the louder the roaring in their head became.

They were *so* very behind with answering prayers and it drove them absolutely insane. They were nearly stir-crazy sitting in their realm

like they used to do before their life turned upside down for a second time. They sat their project aside with a frustrated sigh, closing their eyes with exhaustion. The longer they ignored the whispers in their mind, the louder it seemed to get until they found the mental strength to sort through them a bit.

"Errata?"

The longer they went without answering them, the more their magic burned and the more the voices persisted in their mind. It was giving them a headache at this point. Even now, they could feel the sharp, excruciating pain radiating from their frontal bone to the rest of their skull. Dream might have been saying something, but everything else seemed far away at the moment. They just wanted a moment of *peace* without it following a swell of feelings of inadequacy and deafening cries for help. They couldn't help but feel a little selfish for wanting *one break*, especially when the pain it caused their head was so severe.

"ERRATA, *STOP!"*

Erratum opened their eyes again with a sharp inhale as Cross grasped at their arms tightly from behind. The god frowned in confusion as they realized they were facing their altar now instead of leaning their back against it. Notably, dark streams of marrow slid down one of the columns and joined a growing pool at the base of it. Erratum brought their hand to their frontal bone, cringing in pain at the sharp and throbbing pain that it brought. They vaguely noted how unfocused and blurred their hand seemed to be when they pulled it back to examine the marrow staining it. They looked over their shoulder to see Dream staring at them with his hands over his mouth in terror while Cross stared down at Erratum with wide eyes.

"Geeze, look at yourself." Cross sighed as he helped the god turn the right way back around. "Lean your head forward, it's gonna drip into your sockets." He frowned as Dream brought shaky hands up to either

side of their skull. "What was that all about? Dream said you were both talking just fine, but then you suddenly went quiet and started slamming your head against the stone and glitching out." Erratum frowned in confusion as the cracks healed up enough to where they could look up again.

"**I... don't recall doing that. I was having trouble controlling the prayers in my mind and it got a little overwhelming. I don't even remember moving my body, let alone doing... that.**" They frowned, thoroughly disturbed at the idea they lost control of their faculties for a moment. "**It seems the longer I stay here without doing anything, the worse it becomes. It isn't like when I was first here by myself before the voices began when I could sit for years without issue.**" Cross and Dream didn't seem any further calmed by this explanation.

"You're *way* too stressed. You have to figure out a way to unload some of this off your shoulders, hell, delegate it if you have to! You're a Guardian, right? Surely that's something you can do?" Cross suggested with a concerned frown. The god glanced him up and down a moment as they considered this request, humming with sudden interest.

"**Perhaps so. I'll get back to you on that.**"

Killer panted as he nearly collapsed in the foyer with exhaustion. His jacket was partially torn and he looked worse for wear, though none of his associates seemed any better off. "It's not gonna hold long..." He informed the group with a groan. "Fuck, I thought Dust's episodes were bad..." Said monster twitched a bit at the mention, staring off at something unseeable before focusing back on him again. "We can't all have a screwed-up soul like yours that can handle all the levels, dirty human lover." Dust sneered back. "Please, I only worked with them because I was bored. Then it was to get what I wanted from them, and I did in the end. I didn't need the stupid human after that." Killer reminded with a grin.

"We don't have time for your ridiculous back and forth." Nightmare hissed as he lashed his remaining tendrils at them. The others had been either sliced or bitten clean off and would need time and extra negativity to regenerate again. "Boss, we should just kill him," Killer spoke up with a scowl. "He's out of control and he's probably gonna end up dying from this anyway. C'mon, we can be real quick and humane about it." He grinned viciously.

"*NO,"* Killer nearly flinched at the severity of the tone as Nightmare reared up at him threateningly. The dark spirit regathered himself after a moment and resumed snarling at him instead. "Not an option, I can't afford to lose anyone here." He spoke with finality. "What else is there to do?!" Killer demanded as the sound of splintering wood filled the halls. "Dust rode them out well enough but Horror hasn't used magic in *years!* He can't survive these episodes like Dust could!" He pointed out in frustration. Nightmare cursed quietly under his breath, knowing the other wasn't wrong about that. He didn't have much time to think on this as the ground rumbled and growls echoed the halls before Horror was on top of Killer again.

"WELL FIGURE OUT WHAT WE'RE DOING!" Killer shouted as they gripped the wooden handle of Horror's axe as the other gnashed his teeth at him and pulsated an aura of sickly and weak magic. Nightmare clenched his teeth as he tried to come up with anything to do in the moment that *didn't* include caving another hole into the side of his head. He looked to Dust sharply a moment later and raised a tendril at him. "Call for Errata."

"What?! Absolutely not!" Dust snapped as he clenched his fists. He *swore* he would never call out to them for any sort of help and they *meant that.* It was true that they were the one that quelled his own magical storms, but damn if his pride refused to let him consider the option. "I don't want to see their smug face when they get here!" He snapped his mouth closed as a tendril squeezed around his neck a moment. "Are you questioning my orders?! Don't forget I could have struck you down the moment your levels started to drop. *Don't test me."* He threatened him.

"All right, all right!" Dust choked out, gasping for air when the spirit finally released him. "Dammit..." He hissed as he stayed seated on the ground. "I'm gonna hate myself for this..." He grumbled as he closed his eyes.

"Anymore than you already do? Is that possible? Haha- OW! He *bit me!"*

"Shut up I'm trying to concentrate!" Dust hissed as he clenched his eyes closed tightly. It took him a few minutes to string together something that wasn't entirely hostile in their mind and wondered vaguely if the other would even bother to hear him. It didn't seem like anything was happening as he opened his eyes. Killer was trying to overpower Horror, who just as easily shoved him back down onto the ground savagely. "I knew this wouldn't work, we have to-" The words died in his throat as the familiar rift appeared between them and the god stumbled their way out. They appeared tired, potentially even still wounded from the last time they encountered them. Dust briefly thought of how foolish and reckless it was for them to come without seeing if it was a trap.

"Where is he?"

"Where do you think?!" Killer shouted from the floor as Horror changed his strategy to attempting to wrench the axe from Killer's grasp. Erratum quickly moved to grip the blade of the axe with several tight strings before managing to rip it away from the both of them. This unbalanced Horror enough to allow Killer to kick him square in the chest and dislodge him. He scooted back hastily from the frenzied monster while Erratum put themselves between him and Horror. They quickly shot forth more threads until they had a secure hold on both wrists and both ankles, effectively immobilizing him aside from violent thrashing. Erratum breathed out a sigh of relief before looking back at the group for an explanation.

"He just started flaring magic and went nuts." Killer offered with a clueless shrug. Nightmare rolled his eyelight before looking back at Erratum. "My theory is between proper meals, rest, shelter, and activity, his soul was able to build its core magic back up. He doesn't have much still, but with the return of magic came the immediate influx of levels and the power boosts that it gives. It threw him into one of these violent magic attacks and, well," He gestured to his battered group and the still snarling Horror.

"Faith and Hope called them magic storms. It's a manifestation of out of control magic that lashes out at high levels until it completely burns up your soul." Erratum noted in the back of their mind the slight shrinking of the spirit's eyelight as they said this. Erratum was doing their best to not tie him up as well and leave him here after what he had done to their mind. They could push it aside for Horror, however. **"I think I have something for this that doesn't include Karma."** They glanced at Dust a moment, who merely bared his teeth at them in response. The god ignored him as they knelt down to the restrained and supine monster on the floor. Horror obviously didn't recognize them as he immediately began half shouting, half growling the moment Erratum entered their line of sight.

Erratum carefully extracted the soul from Horror's chest, causing the monster to stiffen up momentarily as he sensed how vulnerable he was at the moment. The god felt a flash of frustration at how hastily they had been sent back after receiving this power, as they generally had no clue how to do this. They cupped the soul in their hands and observed it, watching as it pulsated and burned hot to the touch. The god closed their eyes as they tried to concentrate on that newer flow of magic within their system. Glitches ran up their arms the longer they concentrated, brows furrowing as they did so. How did they do this the first time? Positivity, right. They had to find positivity to feed into this magic, which was difficult to do when the entire manor was overflowing with negativity. They tried to turn internally instead on memories and echoes of past feelings.

It wasn't easy, but remembering the beaming face Geno gave when he sat before Erratum, Cross, and Dream while holding his lily sparked a warmth inside them that rivaled the chilling negativity. The same ball

of gold that had manifested the first time engulfed the tormented soul in its magic, effectively rendering Horror still and quiet. Erratum kept their eyes closed and focused intently on purging and siphoning off the excess to keep the soul from burning through it rapidly. The entire process took around twenty minutes, and by the time the god returned the soul back to its owner, they were dripping sweat and out of breath.

At least with all the expended effort, the voices were back to their normal soft lulling.

The strings dissolved away from Horror's body, the god too exhausted to keep the other tied up. Horror groaned as he rolled to his side and curled in on himself tightly, though the whiplash of magic had ceased. Nightmare gave a near-inaudible exhale as things grew quiet and still once more. Erratum managed to pull themselves over to Horror to examine him, satisfied only when they saw him breathing steadily and face smoothed of pain. "**He's unconscious, but he'll live.**" He announced to the group.

"Cool, he lives to see the day I beat his ass for ripping my jacket and gnawing on my shoulder." Killer mockingly cheered from his position flat on his back. He momentarily craned his head up to appraise Horror before letting it drop back to the floor. "Actually, I don't wanna fight that fight. I'll just put tinfoil in the microwave again." He conceded. "You'll do no such thing!" Nightmare snapped at him. Erratum would almost find it endearing if they weren't so absolutely done with the lot of them. It was going to be a pain just to create a doorway back to their own home.

"**If that is everything, I am going to see myself out. I need to recover after expending all that magic.**" Erratum stated, eyes sharpening at the look on Dust's face. "**Don't mistake that as an opportunity. You don't want to see what else I can do to you.**" They outwardly threatened, much to the surprise of all of them and to the fear of Dust. Seeing they were all thoroughly pacified, the god sighed as they simply fell through a rift in the floor. Less effort, though the landing would probably be less than ideal.

They found they were completely right as their back met the grassy ground below. They groaned and laid one arm over their eyes, waving their hand around a moment until Verse appeared. After setting the 'time' to night, they allowed their arm to fall back to their side limply. Dream stared down at them with visible disapproval etched onto his face, Cross standing right beside him with an equally annoyed expression and exasperated body language. "**I know, I know.**" Erratum grumbled at their disapproval. "**I had to do it though, for Horror. And so he wouldn't kill your brother and his little 'roommates'.**" They defended their actions, though they could tell it did little to help their case.

"Okay, we'll come back to that whole other can of worms in a moment." Cross informed with a confused expression.

"Yes as much as that concerns me, so does the strain you put yourself through." Dream pointed out as the god momentarily glitched and fizzled as they touched Verse. "**I'm fi-fine.**" Erratum denied as the task menu vanished after another moment. "You're not *fine!* I can barely even understand you!" Dream could completely understand why Geno and Cross were constantly so passively sarcastic and frustrated all the time. Erratum frowned as they waited for the pixelations to pass before attempting to speak again.

"**No, you're right. I have noticed that I have progressively taken on more than I can handle.**" They agreed, much to Dream's satisfaction. "**But,**" Dream looked less excited by this continuation. "**I think I have a solution for a lot of this.**"

"I'm afraid to ask, but what would that be?" Dream frowned as Erratum finally rose back up on their feet with a grunt of pain. The god looked between the two of them a moment before giving a small smile and resting a hand on either of their shoulders.

"I have decided to designate a champion."

Chapter End Notes

Do you like my totally cool, 100% non-cliche courting idea lmao. It's not supposed to be in this story but, you know, GENO AND REAPER. I figured if it somehow found its way in here then I'm gonna shoehorn in more diety stuff.

Also, this was WAAAAY longer than it was supposed to be, oops. Heavier plot is gonna start pouring in real soon and I'm excited about it. I love Erratum so very much, but they have to suffer just a tiiiiny bit for the story.

Chapter 18: My Champion

Chapter Summary

> The day has come for Erratum to declare their champion. The choice is not an easy one.

Chapter Notes

> This has been a chapter I wound up thinking way harder on than I expected. Everyone in the comments made me second guess every single decision I was gonna make and I love that so much lmao. You don't understand how a few comments have made me go "Oh? hm, let me see" and adjust bits of the story. I love that, never stop your enthusiasm ya'll.
>
> Enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Fresh was not at all disillusioned with the knowledge that he couldn't possibly be a champion candidate. He was perfectly fine with that too; it sounded mad time-consuming and tedious in his opinion. However, watching everyone else rush around was pretty fun if you asked him.

After Erratum had made their announcement about selecting a champion, Dream had thrown himself headfirst into arranging an entire ceremony of sorts for it. Erratum had seemed a bit flustered at the idea, but Dream had been more than a little insistent.

"No one has *ever* seen a Guardian select a champion!" Dream had enthused with his eyes practically sparkling. "It's a once-in-a-lifetime event! We *have* to gather some of the other deities at the *very* least!" He had insisted without much room for Erratum to argue. In the end, everyone knew the god was enough of a pushover to allow the other

to have his way.

So that is why Fresh found it interesting to see the god pacing at their temple and pixelating in and out of existence, occasionally staring down their statue resemblance as though it could solve their problems. Fresh was bored enough to pester, so he decided to investigate. "Heya broski!" The god jolted a bit, obviously not having heard the other approach for once. "You got some mad anxiety right now, my dude. Harshin' the vibes." Erratum gave a patient sigh at the other's lingo.

"Tone down the strange dialect for me, you know it is difficult for me to follow." Erratum frowned at him. "Aww, you're no fun." Fresh protested as he leaned against Erratum and grinned. "You gonna say what's on your mind then? Or I could just keep buggin' ya with my totally radical linguistics, brah." He grinned at the twinge of annoyance that briefly passed over the other's features. He *loved* being a pest, practically fed off of the irritation he brought.

"**If you must *truly* know,**" Fresh gave them a thumbs up to encourage them to continue. "**I've found myself at a bit of an impasse as far as selecting a champion would go. I hadn't considered how difficult selecting between people would be.**" They frowned and sat at the foot of their altar. "**There are benefits to different people in this role, and I'm a bit lost on where to go from here.**"

"You're totally buggin' about picking between your friends, dat's what it comes to right?" Fresh could read between the lines when he wanted to. "Aiight well, if you don't wanna choose, just have someone else pick for ya!" Fresh's glasses shifted to an "E-Z" as he looked at Erratum.

"**That,**" Erratum started as they gave him the weariest, most exasperated look they could muster. "**Is by far the worst suggestion I could have possibly imagined. You continue to somehow surpass my expectations, and *not* in a good way.**" They informed the

delighted parasite. They took a moment to consider this ridiculous idea before moving to a different train of thought. Having someone else select was out of the question; it was *their* choice to make, but perhaps a second opinion wouldn't hurt. "**I think I'm going to discuss this with the other Guardians before I make a definitive choice.**" They decided as they settled themselves more comfortably on their altar.

"Sick! When ya gonna go then?" Fresh questioned the other with interest. Their shades shifted to a couple of question marks as he was greeted with silence in response. "Yo, you good?" He questioned as he looked over to the god. Erratum had their eyes closed and was obviously no longer listening to him. The markings on their arms and forehead were pulsing a bright golden colour as they allowed themselves to slip from this plane.

"Ay, it's kinda rude to just bail in the middle of a conversation!"

Erratum welcomed the comfortable feeling of Karma's spectral embrace the moment they stood before the Council. They knew they didn't even have to explain why they were here at all, as they always seemed to know exactly why. Probably Time's doing, the nosy celestial.

"We are delighted to see you have decided to take on a champion. Your physical body has begun to suffer from holding your astral body and siphoning your magic into another may help you." Karma spoke around them, causing Erratum to momentarily abandon their original intent.

"**Astral body?**" Erratum questioned as they looked down at their own hands. "**You mean like how the rest of you look? That's... just inside of me?**" It was an unsettling thought to have. Their entire being coalesced and packed within their former body, like a hermit

crab in a shell. Or a gas filling the entirety of a closed container, which only served to make them feel existentially claustrophobic. *"Try not to think too hard on that. I can sense it causes you some distress."* Karma offered, though it did nothing to actually help.

"That is not what this is about," Time spoke up, cutting off Erratum's spiraling thoughts. *"You are struggling to select who you wish to work through, that much is obvious."* Erratum sighed and nodded their head. *"My question to you is: why are you pulling yourself apart for this?"* Erratum wasn't quite sure they understood what they meant. "**I'm not as all-knowing as you Time, I'm going to need a little more than that to understand.**" They informed the cryptic Guardian.

"I will reveal it to you, but only for your compliance."

This grabbed the god's attention.

"I, too, have recently selected a champion." Erratum was stunned to hear this information; they had long thought Time too proud, not that they'd ever say it out loud, and too old-fashioned to involve themselves directly in the multiverse.

"Oh, yes, you certainly did." Fate did not sound too enthused from what Erratum could tell. *"You did make a selection... you did do that."* Destiny seemed to sigh from beside them. Erratum was beginning to worry a little bit about what they were signing up for. "**What is it that you'd have me to do?**"

"They are, admittedly, a little... inexperienced. It is from a younger universe that Fate's champion created and they require a bit of guidance." Time explained to the god before them.

"That's certainly a way to put it..." Fate remarked with a whisp of a

voice.

"**I'm not certain what I could guide them with, as I have no sort of Time magic or even an understanding of your own powers, but I can certainly aide to the best of my ability.**" Erratum promised with an uncertain expression to their face. They really hoped they weren't signing up for some disastrous situation. Time appeared pleased, however, at this response.

"Wonderful. Now, allow us to explain some things..."

Erratum shifted nervously from where they stood on their altar. Even after going over everything with the Guardians, they still felt incredibly anxious over what would transpire today. It didn't help that there were so many people here to watch them make this important choice.

Dream had pulled in as many deities as he could, which wasn't many considering everything, as well as some of their close circle and their families. Epic had even popped in when he heard the news, interested in actually seeing this Guardian for himself. Erratum was amused to no end when they saw how fast he and Cross hit it off within moments of meeting each other. Reaper had extended an invite to Life and was now standing there loudly introducing and going on about Geno while the poor monster pressed his face in his hands in mortification. The Toriel-based demigod gave a delighted laugh and was just as enthusiastic in greeting the embarrassed monster. Horror had immediately crushed Erratum in a teary hug when he arrived, which took the god several minutes of reassurance that no, they weren't upset with them and, no, Horror didn't hurt them. After thoroughly convincing him, and with a little help from Blue and his brother, the other was satisfied enough to let them be. Erratum had never had so many people in their plane before, but they thought they could

manage it. The only issue that had arisen so far was trying to convince the visitors that yes, Fresh was here and, no, he wouldn't hurt anyone.

"Hey! Down here!"

Erratum broke out of their anxiety-filled thoughts at the sudden call. They looked around a moment with a confused expression.

"I said *down here!"*

Erratum turned their head down to see a smaller skeleton at the foot of their altar. They stepped down toward him before crouching down so they could better see the child. They held their hand out with a soft smile as the smaller child grinned and placed both of his own in theirs. **"I didn't see you there, child. I don't recognize you, are you perhaps here with someone?"** They questioned curiously. They didn't recall any of them having any other siblings or children, so they continued to draw a blank. The child didn't seem bothered by this as he shook his head.

"Nah, I was told to come here!" He explained, which only further puzzled the god. "I'm Sans, obviously duh, but everyone calls me T.K!" The child introduced themselves. "Stands for Time Kid." He further explained. Erratum stared off a moment into the distance as horror overcame them.

Time Kid.

Time.

Time had *literally* selected a *child* as their champion.

And Erratum had agreed to watch over them.

They had agreed to become a LITERAL guardian to the Guardian's champion.

"**A-ah... I see.**" Erratum momentarily glitched out and fuzzed a bit around the edges. T.K didn't seem to mind too much, appearing even fascinated by the other's appearance. "**So... you would be Time's champion, correct?**" They had to make sure; maybe it was just a coincidence. Maybe they were just overthinking it.

"Yup!"

Wishful thinking.

"It was kind of surprising, you know?"

Oh, did Erratum know.

"But they said that there was a Guardian here in the multiverse who could help me understand all of this!" Erratum didn't bother to point out that even *they* didn't understand all of this god stuff. No need to make the kid panic though; Erratum was doing enough of that for the both of them. T.K looked back as another smaller bundle ran towards them, nearly tripping over their own feet as their goggles fell over their face. "And that's my bro, Papyrus."

Erratum vowed to get back at Time for this, somehow, someway. They'd figure it out.

"You are a mere babybones, and you have been chosen for something far greater than yourself." Erratum frowned slightly as they watched T.K half hold, half-hug his brother. **"I am... surprised, to say the least. I have been instructed to guide you, and I will certainly do that, but I must also insist that you let yourself be a child at the same time."** They were beginning to feel like they had only taken on more stress to equal out the giant weight they were about to take off their shoulders.

"I'm not a babybones," T.K huffed indignantly with a glower. "I may be little, but I'm still a Sans! I'm strong! I can move through time and universes!" He protested, which brought a small smile back to the god's face. **"I am aware, and I am not doubting that you are strong, but it still worries me. I have been around nearly a millennium, so forgive me for seeing most of you like young children."** They informed.

"Wow, you're old."

Ah, children.

"Hey Errata, we starting this thing or what?" Cross called out from beside Epic. "People are starting to get antsy, bruh. Let's cut to the chase, homie!" Epic added on as well. Erratum rolled their eyelights a moment before gesturing to the group of them. They seemed to get the message as they began to corral the guests around the altar for the viewing of the event. Erratum felt that anxiety return as they gazed upon all of those gathered around their altar.

"Thank you for taking the time to bear witness to the selection of the champion of Order." Erratum addressed the group as they all fell

silent. They passed their gaze upon all of them, feeling a small twinge of pride when they truly realized these were their people. These monsters chose to follow them after they reached out to them. Erratum didn't think they would ever quite wrap their minds fully around that.

"**My life was chosen for me, and while I mourn the world I've lost, I do not regret the path I'm on now. My domain lies in the balance; keeping the multiverse as close to equilibrium as I possibly can. Life and death are both well balanced, and I thank you both for that.**" They looked to Reaper and Life, who gave a respectful nod and raised their hand to their chests. "**Negativity and positivity remain at war, but I am aware that the spirit of positivity works overtime to keep the balance from completely shattering.**" Dream gave a more reserved, saddened smile at this as he clenched his fist to his chest a little tighter. Erratum gave them an understanding nod before continuing. "**And last, the balance of creativity, which is currently unopposed with any counterbalance. I was originally supposed to be the destroyer to equal things out once the creator got out of control, but that never came to be. Due to this, the multiverse is rapidly filling with universes everyday and runs the risk of eventually causing mass extinction.**" A shudder collectively passed through the gathered group. "**While I have yet to find a permanent solution to this issue, I do have a few leads. Until then, I am far too busy to spread myself as thin as I do, and thus, I have elected to choose a champion.**"

"**The person that represents me should display the qualities and virtues that I stand for. Justice, perseverance, humility, and self-sacrificing. More than that, I believe a person who has had firsthand experience with what this multiversal crisis can do would be fitting. Someone who suffered from complete destruction at the hands of an unstable universe, and yet chooses to serve a higher cause rather than act out of animosity.**" Erratum met surprised eyelights as they zeroed in on a monster at the front of the crowd.

"**Cross,**"

Cross stood there in silence a moment, frozen to the spot as the other called for him. Dream eventually nudged him lightly with his elbow, an amused expression on his face as the other snapped out of it. He glanced back at Dream, who gave him an encouraging smile before slowly approaching Erratum at their altar. "Me..?" He checked, making sure he understood correctly.

"**Unless there is another Cross here that I'm not aware of.**" Erratum replied with a soft laugh. "**You look surprised, why is that? You told me when I first rescued you that you would act as a guard for me and protect me, whether I needed it, or *wanted it,* or not.**" They placed a hand on the top of there head. "**However,**" They gave them a more serious expression. "**This is *not* for you to see yourself as a tool or weapon. You are an individual, well, you and Chara are both your own persons that is. You both, together, are more than worthy of being the champion of a Guardian. I am honoured that it happens to be me.**" They huffed a small laugh as Cross hugged them around the waist.

"I won't let you down... I swear it, I promise. Both of us, we both will do our best." Cross promised the god, who only nodded in understanding. Cross gave an embarrassed grin as he pulled back after a moment and gave the crowd a sheepish look. Erratum stepped away from their altar a moment and stopped before Blue, who gave them a confused look.

"**You have always been loyal to me, Little light. This was a tough decision for me to make, and it took extensive debate with the other Guardians for me to come to my decision.**" Erratum explained while Blue gave them a small smile. It's true, he did feel a bit of a sting of disappointment, but he had already expected this. Cross had far more experience than himself with fighting and protecting others.

"I know, I-" Erratum held their hand up a moment to silence him.

"**I can sense what you're thinking, and I assure you that you're incorrect. You are strong, Blue, and you have shown judgment and righteousness in the face of opposition. You've gone against even your closest friends to stand up for what you believe in, and for what is good.**" They gave the smaller skeleton a fond look, to which the other beamed back up at them. "Well, I definitely can't argue with that! I'm nothing if not dedicated to what I believe in!" He agreed.

"**Indeed, which is why you are *also* to be my champion.**"

Blue physically jolted at this sentence, giving them a wide-eyed look. "Wh-?? But, but you... and Cross..?" He tried to form his thoughts together while they comprehended this implication. Dream also seemed surprised but waited for Erratum to further explain.

"**I deliberated with Time and Karma, and we all came to an agreement regarding the state of this multiverse. It is on the brink of disaster, and currently, I am the only Guardian here with the ability to directly interact with it. My domain is Balance, Order... my champions, too, must represent that.**" They explained as they gestured for Blue to follow them. Blue glanced back at his brother a moment, who simply squeezed his shoulder gently with a proud expression on his face. Blue nodded as he followed Erratum and stood on the opposite side of them, leaving Cross on the other side.

"**Cross, you are a warrior through and through. You fight off enemies without hesitation and regardless of the danger. Your sword and your power are your weapons.**" Erratum turned their head to look at Blue next. "**Blue, you are the equivalent of an abbot. You dedicate yourself to serving people and you've elected to dedicate your time defending others and doing good in my name. You are unafraid to stand and oppose those who are wrong, and you are quick to speak up and voice what others may be afraid to. Your words are your weapons.**"

They gestured for the both of them to stand in front of them, to which they both obediently followed. Erratum gave the both of them a soft, gentle look as a hand came to cover both skeletons from their socket down to the bottom of their mandible. One hand rested on Cross's right side, while the other rested over Blue's left.

"I, Errata, Guardian of Order, declare both Cross of Xtale, and Blue of Underswap, as my rightful champions. And so it will be." Golden magic flared from their ley lines as it collected into their palms and pushed its way into the two monsters before them. The feeling of pixels and glitches were sharp against both of their faces as well, almost to the point where the contact was unbearable. Erratum held them there until they both felt they were about to tap out, then it all faded away again. The god gave them both proud looks as they examined the marks of gold left behind on their faces. They manually turned each of them around to face the crowd again, placing their hands on either of their heads.

"I present, for the first time, the champions of Order."

The crowd roared with approval, shouts of joy and celebration filling the air as they welcomed the two into the world of chaos that is being associated with a deity. Dream rushed up to the altar and grasped onto Blue's hands with an excited sparkle in his eyes. "Blue! Oh my gosh, you're a champion!" He nearly squealed while the smaller monster laughed, still in disbelief. "You're going to do amazing things, and I hope you'll still let me be there with you for all of this. I know things have been... a little tough since the Star Sanses went south, but-" He paused as Blue squeezed his hands tighter.

"Dream, you're like, my best friend," Blue assured him with a sincere smile. "We might not be the Star Sanses, but we're much more than that. We don't need a fancy name for it." Dream gave a soft smile and hummed affectionately in response. "Spoken like a true champion."

Cross gave a wide grin as Geno crushed him into a hug while Reaper hung back a bit with Life. "Couldn't have gone to a more deserving monster." Geno pulled back a bit as he looked over the guard. "Are you getting teary-eyed?" He teased him affectionately. "C'mon, what kind of pansy champion are you?" He taunted, snickering a bit as Cross pulled him into a headlock. "I'll show *you* champion!" He threatened as Geno tried to squirm his way out of the hold.

Erratum sighed with exhaustion and plopped down on one of the steps of the altar. That had taken *a lot* of magic out of them, but they did feel lighter. They could feel both monsters like an extension of their own magic, allowing it to continue to flow without straining the physical body housing it all. They glanced beside them, noting a small, white canine settled down on the step beside them. "**You seem to appear at interesting times. I'm becoming suspicious of you, and I will discover your secrets.**" The dog stared up at Erratum a moment, and the god could *swear* something about it-

They didn't have much time to think about it as the dog darted off and into the distance, yipping and vanishing within moments. Erratum shook their head and waved the entire encounter off, deciding it probably wasn't as important as they were making it out to be.

"**I hope I've done the right thing.**" Erratum spoke softly to themselves as the guests crowded the two chosen champions and chattered excitedly.

"**I never wanted to put any of them in the line of fire to protect myself. I'm not foolish enough to think I can do this alone, however.**" They sighed as they listened to the soft dripping of water into the bowl on their altar. "**I can take comfort in knowing this is something they both wanted. That I didn't force anyone.**" Erratum felt they were trying to convince themselves of this, but they knew it was true in the end. Both of them would have continued to fight for them despite any protest Erratum had given in the past. It was better to provide them with the means to do it if they absolutely felt that was their calling.

"If anything happens to them, Guardians above, I will never forgive myself..."

Chapter End Notes

Ha ha! You didn't think I would leave my Little light out, did you? Cross is the big bad scary boi, and Blue is the merciful negotiator. They're like good cop, bad cop, and I love that. This chapter turned really wholesome toward the end and I love that. I love that for all of them, they make me so happy.

A little bit of a shorter chapter (3800 words is short in comparison to what I normally write lol) but I decided this little event needed its own chapter before things began to kick off.

Chapter 19: Dream's requiem

Chapter Summary

Erratum makes a questionable choice to let Dream lead the charge this time. After that confusing confrontation, they finally are invited into another lost soul's despair.

Chapter Notes

https://www.deviantart.com/vcl2006/art/God-of-Order-Errata-916066909

UUUUUMM. VCL IS REALLY TRYING TO KILL ME WITH THEIR AWESOME ART. I CRIED JUST AS MUCH AS THE FIRST TIME.

Also, thank you to everyone who comments and reaches out to me. I absolutely adore reading and responding to people, it brings me so much excitement when I see a new comment in my inbox.

Enjoy

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"This entire bonding thing is very strange."

Erratum was trying to follow what was distressing the deadly demigod before them with Dream's assistance. The positive spirit gave Reaper a sympathetic smile as he tried to soothe him. "It's all right! I'm sure we can figure something else out!" He assured him before looking to Erratum hopefully.

"I'm going to need more to go off of if you expect me to help." Erratum frowned at the look they received. "Oh! Well, the next part of courting is a display thing of sorts? It's... hard to explain, kind of old-fashioned." Dream attempted to explain. "Basically, it's about

accentuating some of your most prominent features, usually using a colour scheme that symbolizes your partner." Erratum couldn't help but correlate this to a more animalistic mating display but said nothing of it. "Reaper chose to put the focus on his wings since they're very prominent already and Geno seems to like his feathers. But..."

"Anything to add colour to them involves sticky pastes or paints." Reaper sulked as he leaned against Dream in a pout. "Makes my feathers clump and not to mention it's extremely uncomfortable." He sighed in distress. Erratum found the entire thing a little silly but didn't dare make that known. It was obvious this was important to Reaper and, thus, it was important to Erratum. The god puzzled on this a bit and considered what they could possibly do to help. "**Does it have to be liquid?**"

Reaper seemed a bit thrown by the question. "I mean, no? I can't really think of anything else though..." Erratum nodded a bit before Verse appeared before them. "**I don't toss out any offerings I receive even if I have no use for them. They were meant to be gifts and it would be insulting to do so.**" They explained to the confused demigod. After a few moments of tapping around, a box appeared in front of the Guardian. "**I never question what others find valuable enough to offer, as everything has its own meaning to a person. Shells, rocks, and other little items like that I keep in this box. With proper grinding and refining, we should be able to make enough powder to coat over your feathers without causing them to stick together as paint would.**" Erratum explained as they withdrew a few deep red rocks and pink shells. Reaper perked up immediately at this and quickly moved to sift through the box as well.

"This is perfect, I didn't even think of that!" Reaper grinned up at the Guardian as they collected a variety of rocks and shells. "You really are the best, you know? I know this might be insignificant in comparison to other issues..." Erratum waved this off immediately. "**It isn't insignificant to you, so it isn't to me either.**" Reaper snorted a bit at this. "Yeah, that's about what I expected you to say."

Dream gave a fond smile at the interaction, relieved that the other had found a solution. As Erratum rejoined him, letting Reaper have his time to dig through the box, he began to turn something over in his mind. "Hey, Errata,"

"**Dream,**" The Guardian addressed.

"You said that Nightmare has been... weird, right?" Dream checked a moment without meeting their eyes. "**Weird is a word for it I suppose. The drastic change in behaviour and morals is certainly bemusing to me. One moment he is ruthless and willing to cut anyone's throat for his ambition, the next he's sparing people and swallowing his pride to ask for assistance.**" They responded with a furrowed browbone. Dream nodded a bit at their words, twisting their hands together in a nervous habit. "Next time we come across him and his group... can I ask you to just... trust me? I want to try something and... well, just let me take the lead for the moment. If things turn south, you can intervene at any point." He requested quietly as if expecting the other to blow up over it.

Erratum was admittedly confused by the request but saw no reason to deny him. "**I'm not opposed to it, but I will be watching closely.**" They informed the other, who nodded quickly in response. "I know! And I promise I know what I'm doing!"

Dream had no idea what he was doing.

Now that he was here with Blue and Erratum, the whole idea he had seemed like a suicide plan. It didn't take very long for the dark group to act up again and Erratum had confirmed that they would let Dream take the lead on this. Nightmare was only a few feet away from him

now, his lackeys nearby and grinning viciously at the group.

"I see you've taken on a champion. It's a shame someone so powerful would place their trust in someone so *weak*." Nightmare sneered as he scanned his eyelight over Blue's marked face. The little champion clenched their teeth, but the Guardian placed a hand on his shoulder to instruct him to remain at their side. Nightmare was intentionally attempting to provoke an attack and Erratum wouldn't allow him the satisfaction. They needed to trust Dream on this one, whatever that would entail.

Dream exhaled slowly as he took a step forward, regaining Nightmare's attention. The darker spirit waited for him to launch into a pathetic speech over how he knew the other was still good and all of that nonsense. It never came, however, and his brother just continued to stare at him. Nightmare narrowed his eye at him with an annoyed swish of his tendrils. "What are you looking at?" He growled at the other, irritation rising. Dream said nothing as he continued to observe him, soul racing as he tried to gain his nerve. "*WHAT,* Dream??" Nightmare snapped as the other continued to stare him down.

Dream narrowed his eyes at him and removed the circlet from his head, tossing it aside. Nightmare stared at him for a moment, confusion on his face before the tendrils on his back seemed to retreat back into his body. There seemed to be some sort of flash in his eyelight, perhaps something of recognition? Or something else, Dream couldn't identify. No one else seemed to know what was going on and were hanging back, anticipation heavy in the air. Dream clenched his teeth as he suddenly rushed at the darker spirit with an angry shout.

Erratum was doing their absolute best not to intervene at this point. They had no idea *what* the other was doing other than throwing himself directly into a deadly encounter. Surely Nightmare would simply impale him or dodge the rather weak attempt to attack him.

He didn't.

Nightmare seemed to become equally aggressive, meeting the other head-on as they collided and fell to the ground. The two proceeded to devolve into an almost wrestling match, shoving at each other and trying to pin one another to the ground. They were saying something, it was hard to make it all out as they were shouting over one another. The entire thing seemed... juvenile, more of a quarrel rather than attempting to maim and kill one another. The rest of Nightmare's gang were watching with absolute befuddlement at the two, now wrestling and pulling at each other's sockets, and clothes, and even pushing against each other's faces to get a leg up on the other.

"What's going on??" Killer finally shouted as he watched the struggling spirits on the ground.

"I...I have no idea." Erratum admitted as they all watched with confusion. Blue frowned as he placed his hands on his hips and tapped his foot. "You two are acting like babybones! Guardians above, get off the floor and either talk like civilized beings or actually fight!" He scolded the two, who seemed to completely ignore his words. It didn't even look like the two were aware anyone else was here anymore, only focused on trying to choke out the other. Erratum finally grew tired of this, tangling the both of them in their strings and pulling them up and away from each other. Both spirits continued to thrash and kick out, trying to somehow land another hit on the other.

"Enough!" Erratum rose their voice, effectively causing the two to freeze in place. Erratum rubbed at their temples, exhaling slowly to keep their cool. **"I don't know *what* all of that was, but cut it out! It's embarrassing to see two demigods acting so childish."** They gave them both pointed looks before dropping Nightmare back on the ground and pulling Dream back to their side. Nightmare huffed as he stood from the ground and brushed himself off, clenching his fists as a portal opened. "We're leaving." He announced to the group.

"What? We just got here!"

"Boss, what the hell was all that?!"

"But-"

"GO!" Nightmare shouted as his tendrils reappeared threateningly, causing the group to clam up and quickly shove one another through the portal. Nightmare glowered hatefully back at the remaining three skeletons, eyes lingering a moment on Dream. The positive spirit merely jutted their chin out proudly in response, causing the other to hiss at him before disappearing into the portal. Dream slumped soon after that, moving to collect his circlet again.

"**All right,**" Erratum started as Dream turned to look at the other two. **"What was all of that? I thought when you said you wanted to try something, it would have been more... coordinated? Intelligent? Less completely insane??"**

Dream was smiling though through the scrapes and bruises he had acquired through the encounter. "I know it doesn't make sense to you, but it confirmed a lot of things for me." He assured, which only caused the others to give him confused expressions. "That, what you saw? When we would disagree or fight back when we were still guarding the tree, that's how we would solve the issue." He gave a quiet laugh as he recalled it. "It seems silly, doesn't it? We'd shove each other around and try to pin the other down. Whoever yielded first lost the argument, and that was that. It's childish I know, but that was how we always did it." He explained with a teary-eyed expression. "That, what just happened and what I saw, told me there's still a bit of him in there. If there wasn't, he wouldn't have done all of that. He could have easily impaled me or thrown me off, but he didn't."

"You have a weird way of doing things," Blue remarked with a concerned frown. "That was a big risk to take you know." Dream laughed a bit, as though it meant nothing to him. "I know, but I just...

I had a feeling and I went for it. Sometimes I can still feel him... sense his aura from time to time. It's always brief, but it's definitely there." He sighed as he looked at Erratum with a conflicted expression. "I don't really know what all of it means, and maybe I sound stupid and hopeful like Ink said," That brought a sharp and resentful look from the Guardian. "But I *really think* that he can still be helped."

"Well, I'm not opposed to trying to help!" Blue enthused as he swung an arm around Dream. "If you say he can still be helped, then I believe you! You'd know him best, right?" He insisted, to which Dream frowned a bit. "I'm not sure I do anymore..." He admitted.

"**Regardless,**" Erratum's voice brought their attention back to them. "**Next time you want to 'try' something, please give me more details first. That way, I don't have a soul attack while you're doing it.**"

Dream gave them a sheepish grin in response.

Dust glowered down at the dirty floor of the dungeon, digging his knife into it and leaving more gouges behind. He tried counting his breaths, feeling his soul hammering in his chest and twisting painfully every so often. He tried ignoring rising nausea that would come in waves before receding back before he could gag. It was becoming tougher and tougher each day, and at this point, he wasn't sure how much longer he could take it.

"Took ya long enough." He muttered as he drove the knife into the filthy concrete floor with a scowl. He didn't want to look up and meet their eye, half ashamed and half too prideful to do so.

"**I would say the same to you.**" Erratum glanced around the cell with

slight interest, raising a browbone before looking back to Dust. **"What did you do to land yourself here?"** Dust scoffed a bit as he managed to yank the knife back out of the floor. "Nothin', it's voluntary. Didn't want to be up in the main part of the manor if we're gonna be doing this... shit." He motioned around a moment before leaning his head against the wall and sighing. Erratum moved to settle on the dusty cot in the corner opposite the irritated monster, crossing their legs and waiting patiently for the other to begin.

Dust was stubbornly silent for a while, still refusing to meet their eyes despite the other's obviously relaxed demeanor. He slumped his shoulders a bit and figured he'd already called them here, might as well say something. "I thought I could control myself, ya know? Just stick to simple maiming and terrorizing, easy enough."

"If I had thought that were the case, I wouldn't have set up the punishment the way it is." Erratum remarked, much to the displeasure of the other. "Yeah, well, you were right. Bet you're real fuckin' happy about that." He grumbled with a scowl. **"I'm never happy about having to instill Karma's punishment on others."** Erratum responded despite it being a more rhetorical question. "Yeah, you would. You're too soft and let others take advantage of you. Hell, you respond to people like us." He snorted rudely.

"I find-"

"Don't give me some wise remark in response." Dust cut them off immediately, much to the god's chagrin. **"Comes with the territory."** They managed to joke with a faint smile. Dust didn't seem to find it humorous. "The more my levels drop," He continued, successfully regaining the god's attention. "The more I can *feel.* Even when I went through resets back in my world, I still had that numb drive even at level one. This is... different. Feeling... guilt." He finally put a name to it, as much as he hated to do it. "Going back to my world... it's not even an option anymore. If it resets while I'm there? I go back to one again... and there's no way for me to regain levels." He clenched his teeth tightly as he begrudgingly spilled his fears to the

other. "I just... I just wanted to stop the human, and this was the last hail mary. Kill everyone first and then kill the kid until they finally stop coming back."

"**And then what?**" Erratum questioned with a pitying expression. "**You stay in your world, forever? Alone? Hopelessly waiting in case the human ever returned and started all over again?**" Dust was silent in response, but Erratum already knew the answer. "**You have to come to accept what you can't change. If you really want to spite your story and creator, the best way to do it is by taking a complete left turn. Even I advocate spiteful defiance when the circumstances are right.**"

"You're wasting your breath," Dust shook his head with a roll of his eyes. "I'm not looking for some life-changing, soul-searching path to embark on. I just want the feelings to stop." He huffed as he finally turned his head to look at the Guardian. They still seemed relaxed and off guard, which Dust found foolish of them. Then again, they also knew that he couldn't try and kill them without severely depleting his levels further.

"**Well,**" Erratum hummed as they tilted their head to the side. "**You can't just make guilt 'stop' so to say, especially not for things like this.**" Dust furrowed their browbones as the god sighed and retrieved something from their robe. He tensed a moment as if expecting them to withdraw a weapon, only to be further puzzled when they retrieved a set of needles and half weaved golden fabric. Dust gave them a bizarre expression as they simply began to *knit* in the middle of their conversation. "**You've been through too much now, and you've put your mind and soul through more torment than most people go through in a lifetime. The guilt will most likely never leave you, so long as you continue to return to your senses. As they say, the higher your level, the easier it is to distance yourself from your actions and cause pain. You can't hide from your actions behind your levels anymore.**" They pierced through him with their stare, causing Dust to shudder with dread.

"So you're saying I'll always feel like this?" Dust huffed out a harsh

laugh as he slumped against the wall. "Shit... what's the point in even living if that's all that's left for me? Inadequacy, helplessness, and crippling *guilt* and... sadness?" Erratum examined the monster silently for a moment, letting him process everything before speaking again. "**That's not necessarily true either.**" They replied, causing Dust to give them an irritated expression.

"You said it will never go away but it won't always be here? You're just feeding me bullshit now. Is this a game to you? Are you getting a kick out of this?" Dust snarled at them with rising hostility. Erratum shook their head with a patient sigh as they continued to knit. "**The guilt may always be with you, but that doesn't mean it has to control your life. You have to embrace what has happened and learn how to move forward. If you don't, then yes, you will always be a prisoner to your feelings.**" They gave a soft laugh under their breath. "**I'd suggest a little group therapy thing I have every day, but I don't think you'd get along with the others.**" Dust glared harder at this but made no comment. "**What are things you like to do? That isn't killing or torturing?**" Erratum added the last bit on after a moment of thought.

"Uh... I don't...?" Dust was a bit thrown by the sudden question. "I don't really *do* anything else. This is what I'm expected to do and I take... *took* joy in doing it. I don't even remember what brought me joy before all of the murdering started." He admitted as he stabbed the floor again. Erratum watched him as he seethed and scraped against the floor with his blade. "Not sure anything could really spark any sort of joy for me anymore." Erratum gave a slow nod of understanding, pitying the suffering monster.

"**If I might,**" Dust looked up as the god finally spoke up again. "**You're rather good with your knife, and perhaps utilizing that will be helpful. I find keeping your hands busy helps rampant thoughts quiet a bit. You should look into carving, perhaps with wood or soap.**" They suggested with a slight shrug. "**You might find it therapeutic.**"

"That's your ultimate advice?" Dust deadpanned with a blank

expression. "Soap carving? Wood whittling??" He couldn't believe he stooped so low as to call out to them only to get such absurd answers in response. Erratum looked up from their work, humming a bit as they stood again and crossed the short distance to him. Dust tensed up a bit as the god settled in front of him and produced another pair of needles. He gave the god a confused look as they pulled golden threads from their hands and wrapped them tightly to the needles. **"Here, let me show you how to start."**

And that was how Dust found himself clumsily fastening strings together beside the peculiar Guardian. He had become frustrated quickly trying to untangle mistakes and properly move the needles, but Erratum was patient and walked him through it several times. Now, Dust was able to knit the threads together with moderate success with the god at his side. He was... a little pissed off. Not so much with the activity, but with how *right* the other was. It was surprisingly calming to make something with his hands and it did help quiet his mind a bit. He couldn't understand why the other would go out of their way to do this though.

"You have something on your mind." The god stated rather than questioned him. Dust paused their knitting a moment and huffed a bit. "Why are you doing this? I don't understand what your motivation is. Are you trying to turn me against Nightmare? Are you trying to convert me to the *good* side?" He sneered, to which Erratum gave a soft laugh in return. **"Not at all. I'm not foolish enough to believe I can make anyone do anything without directly taking away their freedom. It's... too much like the creator's own methods. I refuse to fall into that mindset."** They stated firmly. "You really can't stand Ink, can you?" Dust was curious about this feud of theirs. **"He creates universes like yours, and that is something that I feel rather strongly against. Not that your existence is a bad thing, but you never should have been subjected to the story you were given."** Erratum stared solemnly down at their project and Dust could tell that they truly meant that.

"You're stupid for caring for people who don't care about you."

"**Perhaps,**" Erratum offered back with a shrug before replacing their knitting supplies into their robe. "**I should be going. It's already a risk for me to be here under Nightmare's nose, and I'm sure it wouldn't go well if he caught the two of us.**" Dust couldn't argue with that. He frowned as Erratum placed their completed project in his lap. "**Keep your hands covered, keeps you from chipping at the bones.**" The god gave him a knowing look and Dust had to fight to not show any shame on his face. The god offered a compassionate smile back and briefly, placed their hand on his head before it was swatted away. "Ugh, don't get all mushy with me. Just leave before I lose all patience and stab you again." He threatened, but he could tell Erratum didn't take the threat to heart. The god merely gave him a small wave before disappearing through a rift in reality.

Dust slumped into the wall once more, staring up at the ceiling and giving a long sigh. That had been both painful and strangely therapeutic, not that they would ever admit it. He glanced back down to the knitted mittens in his lap. They were well made, a pleasing golden colour to match the magic the other had used to weave them. Dust looked down at his hands, frowning at the self-inflicted chips on the surface of the bones. He sighed once more before slowly sliding the gifted mittens on to cover his hands.

They were warm.

Warmer than he deserved.

Dream stared around at the group of bizarre monsters he sat with. Erratum was quietly watching them from their altar as each of them took turns speaking about what was on their minds, their fears, and their deepest shames. It was definitely not what he was expecting when Cross invited him to stop by for a "meeting" with Erratum and their followers. He squirmed a bit as the god's eyes landed on him, hoping the other didn't expect him to participate.

"You seem anxious." Erratum observed as they felt the anxiety the other gave. **"You're hesitant about sharing your actual thoughts."** It wasn't phrased as a question, and Dream knew that was intentional. Dream shrugged a moment, trying to play it off with a smile. "Oh, it's not really that! Things have been kind of stressful lately, sure, but I've talked with Blue and you a lot, and I'm feeling generally more at peace with everything." He assured them. Erratum didn't even entertain this with a response, which only made Dream squirm a little more. "Really! I've been lucky with what I've been given and I can't say I've suffered the way-"

"I'm gonna stop you right there." Cross broke in, waving his hand as if to dismiss the very idea. "Dream... you don't really think that, do you?" He checked as his eyelights scanned over him. He felt more concerned at the genuine confusion the other stared back at him with.

"Dream," Erratum waited until they had his full attention again, steepling their hands and staring at him. **"You were created and thrust into a world where you were expected to guard a tree of your former mother that bore the fruits of all positive and negative emotions in the entire multiverse. You were manipulated by everyone around you and gaslighted until you felt obligated to fix every issue those around you could come up with because, otherwise, they would find subtle ways to make you feel like a failure. You became alienated from your brother because the villagers worked their manipulative ways to keep you away from him, afraid his 'negativity' would corrupt your positive influence. You witnessed your brother become torn apart by his own despair until he consumed the apples, which in turn caused you to absorb the final golden apple. You were thrust into deity status abruptly with no guidance and then promptly turned into stone for over a century until I accidentally released you. To top it all off, you had *the creator,* of all people, as the one to guide you through your new life and abilities. Now you can't even bring yourself to experience real emotions because you're afraid of the implications that would bring. You have been groomed to be a perfect, positive, ray of sunshine that was expected to kill his own brother and bring happiness to the entire**

multiverse."

It was uncomfortably quiet following this long speech, and no one really seemed to know what to do now. What does one say in response to *that?*

"I mean... when you put it like *that*..."

"Dream," Erratum sighed with exasperation at his response. **"Aren't you tired?"**

Dream didn't immediately respond to this question. His first instinct was to clamp down on the rising emotions in his chest and dampen them; reassuring everyone that it was fine. He'd had plenty of time to grieve his losses and form a new purpose to make him happy. He had formed new friendships and found a real purpose in the multiverse that kept him happy. Happy? Busy? Dream didn't want to think about this. It didn't stop the question from resonating in his mind and soul, however.

Aren't you tired?

"I..."

Dream clenched his hands into fists against his lap, lowering his head

shamefully as his breath hitched on a quiet sob. "I'm... I'm *so* tired..."

Erratum gave him a pitying look as he sobbed and pressed the heels of his hands against his sockets. The group of monsters around him slowly began to show signs of draining positivity as well in response to the spirit's aura. The god frowned and quickly moved to settle in front of Dream, laying their hands on their back and feeding small bouts of golden magic to him. They felt like Hope and Faith had made them a backup generator at this point for positivity. They really hoped to find some stability in the positivity and negativity balance, because they could *not* handle all of this pressure. Emotions were just obviously not their thing.

"I'm sorry..." Dream whispered against their shoulder as he gripped the front of Erratum's robe. "You're right though... you're so right and I don't want to admit it... I didn't ask for this stupid role in the multiverse. If I could quit, I would! Believe me!" He laughed dryly. "I'm not sure the last time I *actually* felt happy. Surely long before I was turned to stone." Erratum nodded as they stroked along his back, encouraging him to continue. "Do you think... maybe, one day, we can figure this out? That if we can make the balance stable... we can just *stop?* No more fighting, no more spreading positivity and negativity, just letting the worlds *be.* That would be nice... me and Nighty could be at peace."

Erratum blew out a long breath at this, giving the others helpless looks. They were all looking at *them,* however, to make it all better. "**I would like to think that.**" Erratum finally responded as they stared off in contemplation. "**My entire goal is to bring a semblance of Order to this multiverse, so I would like to believe that it is obtainable. I have already promised you that I would figure something out for your brother. I expect you to continue to hold me to that.**" Dream gave a soft laugh, nodding his head against their chest. "Okay..." He smiled as he felt the others gather around and finally join the embrace.

For a moment, everything was peaceful. There was a distinct feeling of hope shining in the air.

Erratum suddenly pulled away from the group with a wail of agony, startling the rest and causing them to break apart. The god fell onto their back, stiffening and clawing at their head as they continued to scream. The ground suddenly began to shake, knocking the group over as it increased in intensity. Temmie skittered by with a frightened "awawawa" as branches broke off of trees and various items against the altar fell over. Geno clung to Reaper tightly as the demigod encased him in his wings protectively while Cross shielded Dream with his own body. As the quaking began to recede, Erratum was left gasping for air and shaking. They were slow getting to their knees, having to take a moment to catch their breath.

They had *never* felt such intense *pain,* never in any battle or encounter. It was as close to the pain they had felt from their conversion to Errata, which was quite a feat. They finally managed to stand again, though the aftershocks running through the ground made them wobbly at best. Windows began to pop up around the god immediately, nearly obscuring their entire field of vision as they attempted to swipe away the excess. They managed to make their way to Verse, desperately trying to figure out what was happening.

"Errata!" Cross was holding onto Dream, helping him stand as Reaper helped Geno back to his feet. "What's going on?!" He watched the god scan over Verse's screen as it blared an alarm at them urgently. Cross stiffened at the look that passed over Erratum's face, which hid absolutely nothing from him. It was one of pure horror, terror, and agony as they looked up at the group with wide eyes. The champion couldn't help but feel terror as well at the idea of something so horrible that it brought fear to the *Guardian.* "Errata...?"

Erratum kept their hand idly on Verse's display, mind whirling and shockwaves of pain still prickling at their bones. They shook their head the smallest bit in disbelief. "**It can't be... it's... it's too soon.**" They muttered as the others continued to feel a rising sense of terror.

"It's started..."

Chapter End Notes

Lots of Dream in this one. Also if you don't like the Nightmare and Dream scuffle scene, I'm sorry but I don't care, because I LOVE it. The imagery of these two intense stoic spirits fighting like kids is the best.

What's happening now? Well. Dunno. Guess we'll see. ╮(¯◡ ◝) ∫

Chapter 20: Help_tale

Chapter Summary

Erratum faces the horrible reality that miscalculations happen.

Chapter Notes

Oh hello there. I can see you've been anxiously waiting for this chapter, which is a great flatter to me btw. Seeing that this has reached over 7k reads is absolutely wILD.

I hope you will enjoy what I have decided these... "events"... will look like. I thought, personally, that it was a clever spin on a common trope in this type of series (FGod, that is).

Enjoy

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"W-what do you mean?" Cross stammered as the ground finally stilled and allowed them all to regain their balance. "What's started? Errata??" He tried to coax answers from them, but the panicked look in their eyes made it clear they didn't hear him.

Erratum was busy dealing with the overload that still pounded in their mind. There had been a sudden, sharp tidal wave that crashed over their mind that had knocked them out of their senses. It was a multitude of screams, and pleas, all of which became intermingled with each other until they all overlapped. It was as though they were all speaking at once, *as* one. They couldn't make sense of it, but they could identify where it was coming from. They wasted no time, physically tearing at the air and opening a new portal into a universe they had not seen before. Erratum didn't see anything too suspicious at first, but the atmosphere was... off. They could sense that Dream felt the same as the spirit shuddered from behind them.

"Errata, please! What's happening?!" Geno called out as the other stepped through the portal and vanished. "Shit!" He swore as the god disappeared without answering. "Something isn't right, they weren't acting right..." He frowned as he looked to Reaper, who gave him a helpless shrug. "I don't know where they went or I would follow them." He apologized to his distressed partner. Cross clenched his teeth, stressed and irritated that the other had gone in without him.

"Verse!" Cross called out, the only thing he could think to do. The task menu only appeared to Erratum, as far as any of them knew. Even though they could all touch the little windows it consisted of, it didn't react to them like it did Erratum. Perhaps, however, now that he was a champion...

The command menu popped into existence in front of Cross, who gave a triumphant sound. "Yes! Okay, okay... um..." He tried to think of what to do now; he wasn't actually expecting this to work. "Show us Errata! Where are they?" He commanded the window after a moment of thought. He was offered an "¬_¬" on the displayed screen. Cross gave an exasperated sigh as he clasped his hands together. "*Please,* Verse?" He tried again. It must have satisfied them, as the screen stretched out in front of him and began to display what appeared to be a live feed from somewhere.

"Ah! There they are!" Dream pointed out as the group of monsters gathered around the console. "What's... what are... *those?"*

Erratum arrived in the snowy landscape of the new universe, panting and looking around with wild eyes. They couldn't outright identify anything wrong, as it all appeared to fall in line with the normal landscape of Undertale. They knew better than to be relieved or

calmed by this as they continued forward at a frantic pace. They should have *known.* They should have taken this into account a long time ago. They couldn't believe how *stupid* they were! Things were too calm, and to expect there to be thousands of years before issues began to rise? That was their biggest mistake.

They stopped abruptly as a new sensation crawled along their spine. They could hear... something. They weren't sure what it was, but it was from behind them. Dread gripped their soul tightly as they slowly turned their head to look back over their shoulder.

There weren't words to describe the feeling the sight brought.

This... *thing.* It stood, or more floated perhaps, before them. It was an indistinguishable shape, ring-like with other bits branching off and undulating. There was something within the center of the ring, a face perhaps? Several faces? Bits of facial features? Erratum couldn't make heads or tails of where this thing started and where it ended, but they knew one thing for certain.

It was in ceaseless, intense agony. It pulsated with every undulation and quiver that it gave, saturating the air around them with a nauseating mix of pain and suffering.

Erratum was nearly brought to their knees by it, hands quaking as they turned fully to face this... *thing.* They felt their breath quickening further as it hovered closer to them, causing them to shoot strings out in defense. They had no distinguishable body part to attempt to bind, so they aimed directly for the soul, or at least in the general direction of where they expected it to be. They grunted as they were met by an incredible amount of force, as though the soul were as dense as a neutron star. A few more heaves finally pulled it loose, though it didn't stray too far from the abomination. Erratum was unable to pull it toward them further, and frankly, they weren't sure they really *wanted* to. They could hear frantic whispers and the pulsations of several individual beings from the larger, distorted soul they

possessed.

This wasn't just a soul. This was *many* souls.

"**Oh... Guardians above...**" Erratum breathed as they released the soul and took several steps back away from this thing. They knew what had happened now, and it made them want to both scream with horror and vomit all at once. The universes had, indeed, collided as they had feared. Several different universes had brushed along each other and, rather than imploding or taking out more in the neighboring radius, they had simply... *merged.*

Every monster, every single soul, together. Every Sans, which floated before them, combined together in one mass as the "new" universe left behind tried to compensate for the combined worlds. This failsafe kept the beings "alive" if one could call it living, by forcing them all together in an amalgamation. While it kept the combined universes somewhat stable, it was obviously extremely painful for the monsters involved.

"**I didn't... I never thought if the universes collided... that they would melt into each other... that the inhabitants would be corrupted into one another...**" Erratum muttered to themselves, trying to come to terms with what had happened. It didn't seem real, it didn't *feel* real. None of this should be happening, it didn't make sense. This wasn't a viable universe, and every garbled plea was begging for it to stop. Their breath hitched as something collided with their back and forced them to stop their retreat. Reluctantly, they glanced back and saw a partially delimbed and melted Papyrus. They jerked back and scanned over this newer being(s?) with equal trepidation. The form of this Papyrus began to shake before what appeared to be arms and hands separated from the melted bones with sickening cracks. Each one held a new skull with everything from the glabella to the maxillary completely caved in.

"**No...**" Erratum whispered as they glanced back again to see the other

pulsating monstrosity hovering closer again. "**No no... this can't be right! It *can't!* The multiverse still has so much space! How... how could this have happened so soon?!**" They shouted, but there wasn't anyone there that could answer this question. The other couldn't help but weep, their soul full and bursting with empathetic agony and suffering. "**You can't... you can't live like this.**" They stammered after another moment of silence. "**You... I...**" They looked down at their own hands with fear, eyes becoming hazy as they considered their only available option.

"**I... I can't fix this...but...I can make it stop... I can end this suffering...**" Erratum wept as they said this, unwanting but willing to make this decision. "**May the other Guardians have mercy upon my soul...**" They breathed as they closed their eyes tightly and held their arms open.

The surroundings began to shake and glitch, parts of scenery beginning to fade in and out of existence as it did so. The two creatures seemed to screech and garble unintelligible words, but they too were shifting and pixelating with the rest of the universe. Erratum continued to draw the world together, focusing on the entire living and breathing code that they were intimately familiar with within each world. It all coalesced down until it swirled together and packed tightly into a mess of code and light that the other held within their hands, much like when they had taken Ink's attempted creation of Horrorswap. Erratum floated within the empty blackness that was left behind, the universe entirely gone from the multiverse. The god allowed themselves to maneuver back into a summoned portal, hitting the ground on their knees and clutching tightly to the condensed universe in their hands.

"Errata!" Cross called out, Verse vanishing as the other returned. Each monster seemed mortified, but Erratum wasn't paying attention to them. They had to steel themselves as they stared down at this ball that was once several thriving, individual universes. They clenched their eyes closed tightly as they brought it up to their face and consumed the entire code, body shaking the entire time they forced it down. They could feel the immediate boost it gave to their power, but it felt tainted, *wrong.* The other immediately slammed their hands onto

the ground as they lurched forward and heaved, watery magic being expelled from their mouth as they gagged.

The group was alarmed but unsure of what to do, afraid to approach the other as they vomited and sobbed. Cross could feel the call from them, however, for help. He wasn't sure if the god was aware they were signaling their champions for help, but he responded regardless. He rushed to the god and slid onto his knees to place a firm hand on their back. A bright burst of light revealed Blue landing before them with equal alarm in his eyes. He wasn't sure what to expect when he was called, but this was much more frightening than any battle he was expecting.

"I HATE HIM!"

Everyone flinched at the sudden outburst the other gave. Blue settled on his knees in front of them as well, eyes wide with fright as the god balled their fists into the grass.

"I HATE HIM SO MUCH! I HATE HIM!" Erratum continued to scream with anguish. **"WHY WON'T HE STOP?! WHY WON'T HE LISTEN?! I HATE HIM! I ~~HATE HIM~~! I ~~HATE HIM~~!"**

The words became less and less understandable the more hysteric they grew, and no amount of reassurance or comforting touches would calm them. The other finally reared backward again, seizing momentarily before their sockets became filled with glitches. Windows popped up all around them with errors displayed before the god simply collapsed onto their side. Blue cried out as he moved to their side and frantically checked them over. Dream was soon right beside him, trying to uselessly push healing magic into them to somehow stimulate them into waking. The other wasn't waking, or responding at all to their attempts. Dream clenched his eyes closed to attempt to reach them in their unconscious state, but there was nothing there to anchor to.

"I-it's like they aren't even here." Dream spoke as he opened his eyes again. "If they were unconscious or asleep, I could slip into their mind, but..." He wasn't sure what it meant, but Blue's heightened anxiety showed the other was assuming the worst.

"Brah, they ain't sleepin'," The group all paused as Fresh, of all people, spoke up. "Whatever whack episode dat was sent them way off the deep end. If I had to guess, they probably did that reality shifty thing as like a defense mechanism." He shrugged at the stares he got. "Or somethin'." He muttered at their intense looks. Dream nodded a bit at this as he shared a look with Blue. "Okay... then we should keep their body comfortable and safe while they're absent." He allowed Cross to haul the god up, an impressive display of strength for sure, and move them to the makeshift nest that they had once slumbered in. He placed their body gently into the fabrics and blankets, almost as though he were afraid he'd harm them if they moved them any more than that. "Someone should-"

"I got dis." Fresh cut him off as he moved to sit cross-legged beside the god. "Pretty sure you guys got more pressin' deity stuff to do. I'd feel... better, bein' the one sittin' here." His shades remained blank, not revealing anything they might be thinking at the moment. The group exchanged uncertain looks, but no one argued with him. "If you're sure..." Dream agreed after a moment of silent deliberation with the others.

"I'm gonna call an emergency council meeting." Blue frowned as they pulled a blanket over Erratum's body. "You're what?" Dream questioned in surprise. "But... only Ink does that. It's for important multiverse emergen...cies... right." He frowned as he looked at the obviously pissed champion. "Exactly, and I think it's time we all had a talk about this. A *real* talk."

Ink frowned at the odd sensation in his chest. He wasn't sure what to make of it but he was certain he didn't enjoy it. It was like an ache right against his sternum that he couldn't quite relieve. He glanced over to his newer creations, all of which he had created a bit further from the rest of his other worlds. If he kept them away from the others, perhaps that irritating Guardian wouldn't poke their nose into them. He noticed that the strings holding them up seemed to be tangled together, the paper representations pressed against one another and merged.

That was new.

Ink floated up further to view them closer, a bemused expression on his face as he glanced over it a moment. The paper only displayed 'help' over and over, at least, that was all he could identify in it. The world was messy, something he would expect from a mixture of different creations. It was neat, for sure, but it wasn't something Ink was necessarily proud of. It was more a little blemish than an exciting new discovery.

Before he could think to do anything, the page began to shake. Ink blinked once as it began to crumple in on itself as if someone had wadded it up into a ball. The crumpled page ignited in golden flames and sparks before it disintegrated altogether. Ink stared at the place where this world used to be, completely dumbfounded. The world had lit up in a hypnotic gold light before disappearing entirely.

Something had destroyed his universe. And he only knew of one being that could do this.

"Errata..."

Erratum floated within the space of the Between, hands clutching around themselves in self-embrace as they shuddered. The Guardians were silent before them, none of them breathing a word to them as they gathered themselves. "**I... I can't do this...**" Erratum finally spoke up, though their head remained lowered and their body curled inward. "**It's too much... I can't... I can't... please...**" They begged them uselessly. "**Pick someone else, please. I'm not... I'm not capable of stopping this. I can't make these decisions... it's too much for me.**" They wept as they finally looked up at the quiet spectators. "**Please... make it stop... I'm not like you, I was a mortal. I wasn't omnipotent and eternal like you are, I was created by you. More specifically, *you.*"** They looked to Destiny with a pang in their chest. "**I was being shaped as your champion, wasn't I?**" They demanded of them.

"Yes," Destiny admitted without hesitation. *"You were to be my champion, using strings of Destiny to fulfill your place guiding others."* Erratum had an intense moment of grief hearing this. They may not like the idea of being made for the sole purpose of being a servant, but they would have still been who they were first made as. They would have kept their world, their home, all of those they had long forgotten. *"But, as you know, things changed."*

"**Oh, I'm *very* aware.**" Erratum gritted out as they looked to Fate next. "**Why? Why?? Why couldn't you just control him?!**" They demanded of the indistinct being. "**Why can't you force him to listen?? Why can't you bring him here and put him back in place?!**" They continued to berate the celestial being as frustrated tears burned their face. Fate was silent in response to this, whether from indignation or guilt was not clear.

"Ink has no soul, he cannot shift realities like you," Karma responded for them, soft voice doing little to soothe the god for once. *"He cannot project himself here and he cannot be persuaded in through moments of rest due to there being no soul to project."* Of course. Of *course.* Erratum was so outraged that Ink got to go about his life as a deity, never aware of the damage he caused while Erratum was forced to try and clean up behind him. They clutched the sides of their head with a frustrated shout at this response. *"And you know it can't be*

undone. You *are the Guardian of Order, and that cannot be placed on anyone else."* Erratum didn't want to hear this, turning their back to the group.

"There is no one else," Hope agreed remorsefully. *"You are their last Hope. You are so many people's last Hope and there is no one else who can do the things you do in the multiverse. We exist outside it, there is nothing we can do. Our interference is what caused all of this in the first place, we cannot do it anymore. Even so, we can only remain inside our domains of power to assist."*

"**And I carry the powers of the domains of several of you,**" Erratum gave a dry laugh at this. "**Of course... so by extension, they allow me to do things beyond what your individual domains normally allow. Of course.**" They muttered with a shake of their head. "**Why can't you just drag him here as you did me?**" They sounded bitter at the mentioning of it.

"When that happened to you, your entire world collapsed. Ink is connected to multiple universes, and if the same were to happen, it would cause mass damage. The destruction could potentially speed up the multiverse's end." Karma reminded them gently. Erratum knew, but it still burned to know they really couldn't help them. They closed their eyes as Karma surrounded them in a spectral embrace. *"You are weary and hurt. Please, rest with us here for a while. The least we can do is help your mind recover."* Erratum couldn't argue with them, rage turned to apathy as they were guided along to the others. They weren't sure how long they would be here, but they certainly hoped it wouldn't be long enough to worry their followers.

Blue stood at the head of the table at the opposite side where the original Sans usually resided. He had a sharp look in his eyes and his jaw was set in a tight clench as he waited for everyone to arrive. He had kept his blue bandana tied to his neck, but the rest of his attire had gotten a significant rework after receiving his new role. His shirt

was a tighter, darker blue fabric that formed to his body well. Overlaying it was thicker chains of gold, ringed and laced together to form a defensive barrier for himself. His rubbery gloves were replaced with tactical ones, allowing him to freely use his hands and offer them better protection. Even his boots were replaced with tougher material as well which allowed him a better grip for climbing and rougher terrain. Cross had originally teased him for 'dressing the part', but Blue took the danger he was putting himself in *very* seriously.

The first few members began to blip into existence, confused as they saw Blue rather than Ink. While the artist was normally late to regular meetings, he was always the first one present for his emergency gatherings. "Blue? Is that you?" The original Sans questioned as he looked him over. "You look... different." He commented as the swap monster grinned at him. "I'll explain that in a little bit so I don't have to keep repeating myself." He assured him, to which Sans simply shrugged and took a seat next to his normal spot. More and more monsters began to arrive, each one giving Blue a strange look or asking similar questions. Blue dismissed them all with the same answer as he continued to wait. The chattering fell quiet when Ink appeared in a blob of ink, looking around in confusion.

"Okay, who activated my emergency system?"

"I did."

Ink blinked in confusion at Blue as he looked him over. He scanned the golden markings down his face and frowned. "Geeze, what happened to you? A character redesign? I didn't make any edits to the story." He frowned as he read over his scarf a moment. "I think? I don't know anymore." He muttered while Blue rolled his eyes. "You didn't do this, Ink. Errata did."

The room perked up with interest while Ink dropped his scarf and gave him a hard look. "Is that so." This wasn't phrased as a question but Blue chose to address it like one. "That's right. Errata selected me

as a champion of Order to work through them." Blue was proud of this title and held himself high with this announcement. The table broke out into interested remarks and whispers at this declaration.

"Damn Blue, gotta say, that's pretty badass." Red commented with a thumbs up. Blue grinned and rubbed the back of his neck with a flustered laugh. "Thanks! I can honestly say I feel it. I haven't gotten all these new powers down yet, or even really discovered what they are, but I'm learning!" He assured them. Ink narrowed his eyes further at the monster, not sharing the excitement everyone else had.

"You've completely aligned yourself with them then." Ink checked as Blue met his gaze with equal confidence. "That's right. Errata is my god and I've pledged my life to serve them and carry out their will." He confirmed without hesitation. Ink made a move for his brush slowly, but Blue was quick to react. He held his hand out and summoned an impressive war hammer, modified and pulsating with restrained power. "*Don't* even think about it. This isn't a personal attack Ink, and there will be no fighting during council meetings!" He moved to rest the larger weapon against his shoulder, displaying a surprisingly disproportionate fear of strength holding it with one hand. "Oh, you like it? I thought the weapon I got was really clever! A hammer, like the one you'd use in court to call for Order in the court? Mwehehe," He grinned brightly at the mixed expressions in the room."Now... I would like to talk about why we're here."

"Yes, please elaborate." Ink was becoming increasingly impatient as he waited for the other to simply get to the point. Blue's face hardened again as the hammer shrunk down to a more manageable size. "Earlier today, a group of universes collided together and merged into this... horrific... amalgamation of a world." He started off, effectively silencing everyone else. "All the people from each world were spliced together and their souls all became trapped with one another. Dream said there was so much pain... so much agony from these creatures. Errata had to absorb the world just to make it stop, just to give them peace." He looked down as he said this, recalling the intense breakdown the other had.

"So it *was* them!" Ink shouted as he stood from his seat again. "They destroyed that world! I *told you* they would-" Blue slammed his hammer down against the table and a wave of magic washed over it in waves. Ink jolted a bit as he became silent instantly.

"Ink, this was an unstable world where everyone in it was *begging* to die! Because *you,"* He pointed at him with his hammer, causing a few skeletons to duck and avoid the flailing weapon. "Crowded them too close together and they collided with each other! Errata could barely handle the anguish it brought them to make that call!" Blue reminded him with disdain in his voice. "It was an *accident!* I didn't know they were that close together, I just have to be more careful!" Ink insisted with a wave of his hands. "Ink that's not the *point!* The *point* is your creation is out of control! Once again, limited space Ink! This is going to happen more and more the closer we get to using up all the space we have! And then what? We live with the threat of our worlds just... melting together??" He demanded of him.

"Oh, is that how this is?" Ink scowled as he took a quick sip of his red vial. "You're going to push that ridiculous ideology that they're preaching? You're starting something you don't have the ability to finish, Blue." He warned the other. Blue glowered back at him without fear. "I know *exactly* what I'm doing Ink, and if you can't see reason, we're going to have to do our best to *make* you or *stop* you," Blue remarked as a few Sanses moved closer toward Blue's end of the table.

Ink huffed out a harsh laugh at this, scanning over those who hung onto Blue's words. "All right then, I hear you Blue." He assured in a low, threatening tone. A few other Sanses scooted back closer to the creator with a hint of uncertainty at the others pulling away from the group. The room soon had a visible division in it as skeletons looked between one another and the tension continued to mount higher and higher.

"So it's a war you want? Fine, it's a war you'll *get*."

Chapter End Notes

Oop-

Well, you were right. Guess it doesn't have to be critically full for universes to begin colliding with each other. Just poor placement. Poor Errata. They have a full mental breakdown and while they're trying to recover, Blue starts a whole ass war in their name.

Chapter 21: Revelations

Chapter Summary

> Erratum's followers are still stressing over Erratum's unconsciousness and now the newly declared war. While they're busy beginning a plan of attack, Erratum is beginning to discover some horrifying hidden truths.

Chapter Notes

> Hello once again. I notice everyone is 100% ready for war and I'm down for that. Seriously, reading everyone's comments and answering messages is my absolute favourite thing to do. I get so excited when I see a new comment I can respond to.
>
> Anyhow! I'm gonna touch on some interesting things here, plot things, creator things. Let's see your thoughts on Ink at the end.
>
> Enjoy

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"YOU DID *WHAT?!*"

Blue hushed Dream as he hovered over Erratum to check their status. They were still motionless and they were all growing a little worried at this point. "Dream, let's not pretend this wasn't going to happen in the end." Blue sighed as he looked at him with weary eyes. "It's been building and building for a long time. Erratum was giving him all the patience and time in the world, but I'm not going to do the same thing. Erratum has all of us now and if we don't intervene, this," He gestured to Erratum's unconscious form. "Is going to keep happening until it kills them."

Dream frowned as he looked to Cross, who only nodded in agreement. "Like it or not, Hopes and Dreams and wishful waiting aren't gonna

make the multiverse stable. We all here have a job to do, whether through being another's champion or being a protector." He reminded the other who simply sighed in response. "I know but... we're already dealing with Nightmare and his group. All this conflict is going to increase negativity *so much.* I can only imagine he's going to get stronger and harder to manage." Dream glanced back at Blue with worried eyes. "And if more of those... horrible merged worlds appear... stars, he'll have a field day. Imagine the power he could draw if he got in there." The group shuddered a moment at the mere thought.

"Chill my dude," Fresh spoke from where he was settled. Most of them were surprised that Fresh had been literal when he said he would stay with Erratum the entire time. So far, no one had seen him move from that spot. "We got mad wicked people on our side," They all noted silently the use of 'our' in this statement. "And I'm sure we can find more people too." He assured with a thumbs up. "I don't know if there are any other Sanses I feel comfortable dragging into this." Dream admitted as he wrung his hands together.

"Why does it have to be Sanses?" Dream looked to Blue as he said this with curiosity. "Erratum was the first to teach me that there were universes out there that had judges that weren't Sanses. I think this is a perfect time to start bringing them into the picture." When the council was formed, it had been a silent agreement to bring in only Sans judges, as they only felt comfortable leaving the multiverse in each other's hands. It was a common trait that a lot of them shared; the belief that everything fell on their shoulders. Perhaps they were gluttons for punishment? Blue didn't know. "I know Storyswap Chara would have been a great person in the council, but no one wanted a Frisk or Chara there due to, well, you know." He shrugged a bit.

"I don't think that's a bad call." Cross chimed in with a nod. "I say we take all the advantages we can here. On the field of war, there is no fair fighting and when the stakes are this high, I'm willing to work with even my worst enemy. What's that saying? My enemy's enemy is my friend." Dream gave a small laugh at this. "I guess so..." He sighed as he moved to place a hand on Erratum's forehead and closed his eyes. After a few moments of silence, he opened his eyes again with a sigh. "Still not getting anything... guess they're still not in their body."

"They'll be back, they always come back," Blue assured as he patted him on the shoulder. "For now, um... we should prepare how we're going to tell them about all this." He spoke with a nervous laugh.
"Ohhh no," Dream spoke as he pulled away a moment and crossed his arms. "*You* are going to prepare how to tell them about all this. I had zero input on this decision and as a champion, you're gonna look your god in the eye and tell them what you did."

"*Dream!* You're supposed to be my best friend!" Blue whined pathetically.

Dust had noticed Horror was a little off nowadays.

He originally brushed it off as lingering effects from his first major magic storm, but the other hadn't shown any signs that Dust did when he had them. Horror wasn't lethargic, jumpy, or easy to agitate. He had taken to the kitchen, which Dust was admittedly shocked Nightmare had simply allowed him to do, and had cooked and baked excessively. No one really complained because lunches and dinners became a much more pleasant affair. Nightmare's lifting of rations and allowing actual freshly prepared meals was a blessing that none of them were going to question. Still, Dust was becoming a little suspicious.

Definitely not *concerned.* Just *suspicious.*

The monster twitched a bit at soft whispering at the back of his skull. He chose to ignore it as he spotted Horror just down the hall; probably returning back to the kitchen. "Horror," He called out to him, causing the monster to stop and turn toward him. He turned his head to the

side a bit, much like a dog Dust noted silently, and allowed Dust to approach him. "What's going on with you lately?" He questioned, eyeing the other intensely. "You've been acting off. You seem... anxious." He remarked as he watched the other grip at the bottom of his jacket and pull every so often. "Not to mention you basically sleep on the kitchen floor now."

Horror gave a gruff noise and shrugged stiffly. "Just... been thinkin'." He muttered after a slow moment of gathering his words. "Oh yeah? You?" Dust managed to joke, causing the other to give a less strained smile. "But seriously," Dust redirected after a moment. "If something happened, you know you can... talk to us, right? We can squash pretty much any problem so long as it's got a soul. Can't help much if it's emotional crap; you'd need to call someone else for that." He sighed as he watched the obviously bothered monster. He subtly tensed at the look the other gave him, a strange expression briefly passing over his face. "...Yeah." He spoke slowly. Dust felt uncomfortable with the staredown, moving his hands from his pockets to subtly chip at the bone to redirect his mind from the aggressive noise in his mind. The warm threads of his gloves met each other, however, and he quickly remembered to restrain himself. He looked back to Horror at the sharp noise that suddenly emitted from him.

Horror seemed to become *extremely* interested in him.

Dust's eyelights shrank as Horror's large hand gripped his wrist tightly. He pulled Dust a bit closer to view the material of the gloves on his hands before another alarmed expression came over him. He looked behind himself a moment, up and down the hall to make sure it was empty, before placing a hand around Dust's mouth and dragging him into the nearest empty room. Dust shouted muffled protests as he was dragged, growling and summoning dozens of sharp bones the moment he was released. "What the hell are you doing?!" He demanded as Horror locked the door behind him. Horror briefly pressed the side of his head against the door and closed his eyes, listening intently. Deeming they were truly alone, he turned back to the monster with a wild look in his eye.

"Where'd you get those?"

Dust was surprised (and perhaps a little proud) at how clear the question was. "I..." He faltered as he looked down at the handwear. They were a telling golden colour and knitted together with such warm intent it made him momentarily nauseous from guilt. He looked back up at Horror again and began to sweat a bit. "I... got them on a raid. To... keep my hands covered." He knew it was a shit excuse and was certain the other didn't buy it for a second. The growl he received back confirmed it.

"Bullshit." Horror wrinkled his nasal bone as he said this and loomed closer to him. Dust kept the sharp projectiles close to him in case the other decided to attack him or tried to drag him to Nightmare. "You... saw Errata." He accused him as he scanned over his face. Dust clenched his teeth tightly as the other confronted him. "What are you gonna do about it?" He sneered back at him. "You gonna rat on me to boss? You think I'm all buddy-buddy with the enemy? Don't forget *I'm* the one who first successfully incapacitated them."

"Why'd... you call them?"

Dust paused at this, becoming instantly more defensive. "Who said I called them? We stumble on them all the time out in different universes." He immediately denied it.

"DON'T. Lie to me."

Dust tensed up further as Horror raised his voice. "Tell me... why?" The other grew docile once more as his voice lowered, seeing the other becoming skittish. Dust considered continuing to deny it until the other became frustrated and let him go, but he knew it was pointless. Horror was *very* patient and could keep at it for hours before relenting. Even if he teleported away, it wouldn't stop Horror from

eventually finding him and dragging him back. "I... you know I've been losing levels, right?" Horror nodded to show he was listening. "It's... I," He growled as he tried to convince himself to open up. He kept a very firm wall between himself and everyone else, after all. "Regaining a sense of morality sucks." He downplayed.

Horror grunted a bit and nodded at the other's explanation. "They're... good at talking you.. through stuff. Real... smart." He remarked as he watched the other closely. "Whatever, I guess. They say some weird shit." Dust muttered in agreement. "Wait..." Dust quickly jerked his head over in Horror's direction in shock. "*You've* spoken with them??" He questioned with obvious surprise. "Mmhm." Horror rumbled, seeming pleased by the question. "Brings... food. For my world... my bro." Dust twinged a bit at this, and Horror gave him a sympathetic look. "They're... the reason I can...talk." Horror continued as he took small pauses to form his words. Dust might have partially felt a bit of respect hearing this, not that they'd ever tell the smug god. "They're probably just trying to make us all soft and turn to the 'good' lifestyle." Dust sneered as he clenched his fists to feel the strain of the material against his hands.

"You don't... really think that?" Horror questioned with another tilt of his head. Dust sighed heavily and shoved his hands back in his pockets with a frown. "...no, I don't. I did at first, but I think they're just generous to a fault. I giant fault." He muttered bitterly. Horror gave an amused sound at this and nodded in agreement. "Works themselves... to death." He frowned after another moment, that same dreary look Dust had been seeing overcoming him. "Yeah?" Dust questioned, able to take a hint and read into it. "Something... happen?" He questioned carefully. Horror nodded slowly after a moment of deliberation. "Bad things... Ink. They're..." He twitched a bit as he moved to pull at his socket.

"Fuck Horror, how long have you been talking with them to know all this??" Dust moved to grab him by the elbow firmly. "And stop doing that or I'll take this hand off." He spoke firmly. "Kinda... defeats the purpose of... preventing mutilation." Horror spoke with a weary grin. "Ever heard of cutting the head off to save the body?" Horror gave him a blank stare in return. "Whatever, doesn't matter. Just..." Dust took a

moment to look off to the side, a feeling of embarrassment rushing over him. "Ugh, I can't believe I'm gonna do this but..." He moved to fish something out of his pocket, handing it over to Horror. "Can you just... give them this when you see them next?" He muttered softly.

Horror stared down at this offered item in surprise. It took him a moment to realize this was soap, as his keen sense of smell confirmed by the sharp scent it gave. It was shaped down and carved into a design, however, that Horror found slightly familiar. He couldn't quite place it, but the longer he stared, the more he recognized it. "This... is Karma's mark... the one... they carry." He noted as he looked back up at Dust, who refused to make eye contact. "You...make this?"

"Yeah... so what? They suggested doing something with my hands and said something about soap and wood carving. Just thought I'd try it." Dust bit back with restrained hostility.

"Pretty."

Dust flushed a bit as he pushed past him. "Shut up, fuck you, I'm leaving." He spoke quickly as he unlocked the door. Horror rumbled an amused laugh as he carefully tucked the carving away and followed him out.

Both of them froze as Killer stared at them from down the hall.

Killer betrayed no emotion as he took in the two of them. He looked from the room they both stumbled out of back to the two surprised monsters. He noted the amused fondness the larger monster had carried coming out and the still present flush on Dust's face. "Ahhhh, I see." He grinned widely. "That's why you two have been so weird? Psssh, like we all didn't already know. You don't gotta sneak around."

"Killer, holy shit, *NO*. That's not what this is!" Dust immediately shouted, completely mortified by the implication. Horror just furrowed his browbone in confusion, not seeming to quite get what the other was hinting at. "Horror, tell him! Tell him we just went in there to talk!" Dust begged him.

"Well... I more... dragged you in, but-"

"Stars above, say *less!"*

Erratum blew out slow breaths as they sat cross-legged, suspended endlessly in the weightless void that was The Between. Once their initial anguish had been curbed, they had taken to meditating and the use of guided imagery from their mentor. Without the soft whispers in their mind, it was easier to transcend and observe their current situation in a more in-depth manner than before. They weren't certain how long they'd been here at this point, and they couldn't bring themselves to care too much until they reached a solution in their mind. So far, they were stuck on the drive the creator had to create the worlds that he did. They had been certain his dabbling in different themes was to understand emotions better, but they were beginning to doubt that original idea.

Something else was going on here, they could sense it.

"*What is it that you seek?"* Karma whispered softly around them. Erratum opened their eyes for the first time in a while, searching around the empty space with determined eyes.

"Time,"

At the call, said apparition appeared before them without a word. "**I need to see what happened after Fate left Ink in the anti-void. I want to know what happened initially.**" They thought if they could perhaps see this, they could identify where this drive began.

"Why is it I should do this?"

"**Perhaps because I'm *babysitting* your charge?**" Erratum bristled in response. "**That was a nice surprise, might I add. That's neither here nor there, however. I request assistance to be able to understand better how to approach the creator.**" Erratum watched as Time stood there a moment before a whispy sigh sounded from them. Without any further words, Erratum found themselves standing in an endless white void. They turned in a full circle, but there was nothing but white for what seemed like miles.

There, in the distance though, they spotted someone.

As they approached, they were able to identify this 'someone' as the creator that they knew now. The skeleton was by himself, standing over the remains of his own soul and looking around the area.

"Hello?"

Erratum froze as the other called out. Ink wasn't looking at them, however, but rather all around the area with desperation.

"Is... is anyone there? Hello??"

Erratum listened intently, noting the fear and desperation in his tone. They knew Ink failed to recall the directions that Fate had given him, and by the looks of it, that may be because he wasn't even fully aware he was even alive until this moment. He had no recollection of his creation or of Fate at all.

Curious.

Ink began to hyperventilate as he grasped the sides of his skull. He took off running in a random direction, desperate to find anything that wasn't *white* and *empty*. He might as well have been running in place, however, because the environment never changed. Everything was the same, plain, endless *white*. The artist collapsed down on his knees, sobbing loudly as he pressed his forehead against the white ground.

Erratum found themselves back before Time, eyes wide and mind thoroughly confused. "**How long...?**"

"Many years," Time answered before they could ask further. *"It took him quite a while to discover his abilities. Once he escaped, he began to create worlds after discovering our created universe. He was desperate to not be alone, to not be forgotten again."* Erratum huffed out a breath, as though someone had punched all the air out of them. This was a lot to take in to begin to dissect their intense loathing for the artist. Erratum felt there was still something missing here; a motivator, a reason for things to have spiraled out of control. *"I would suggest you speak with Fate directly."*

That was a good starting point.

Erratum thanked the Guardian before calling upon Fate. Once they

had appeared before them, Erratum wasted no time in interrogating. "**When Ink first began to create, it was always one world at a time and in spans of years before the next.**" They looked back to Karma, who seemed to nod once at this information. Erratum had to be certain this was the case, however, even if he trusted everything Karma had told them when they were first created. "**What happened to this? What happened to make him suddenly endlessly create new worlds without stop, for days at a time?**" The god stared through the indistinct shape that was Fate as they were greeted with silence.

"**What did you do.**"

Fate seemed to become guarded at the command. *"You speak to me in such a way?"* The tone in their voice clearly expressed their displeasure. "**I speak to you as another Guardian trying to save *your* multiverse.**" Erratum refused to back down from this. "**I am not below you, I am your *equal.* I deserve to know what has happened to be able to fix it, Fate. *Tell me.***"

The celestial being remained silent for quite a while, but Erratum never wavered from their demands. It seemed to be an eternity before Fate began to speak again. *"You recall the events of Dreamtale, I am certain."* At the god's nod, they continued. *"After the destruction, and ultimately Dream's imprisonment in stone, the creator fell into a sort of rut. No matter the combination of paints, there was no more inspiration to create worlds. I could sense the slightest echo of sadness, and loneliness within him despite his lack of soul. So, I sent what I would call 'muses' to assist him."*

"**What do you mean by 'muses'?**" Erratum pressed with a slight frown. "**I thought you hadn't been allowed to interact with the multiverse after what happened in Dreamtale?**" They questioned suspiciously.

"No one was aware they had." Karma did not sound pleased at this development, and Erratum now understood why Fate had been hesitant to reveal this. *"You would go against our warnings after what your champion had done?! While we were busy crafting the demigod universe to repair the broken balance, you would sneak away to further interfere?!"* Erratum shrunk down at the outraged boom of Karma's voice.

"Just as you wished to help Destiny's supposed champion, I too wished the same for mine!" Fate defended back with equal outrage. *"Who could fault me for wanting the best for my creation? Who could shun me for wanting the best for him?!"*

"**No one could fault you for wanting to help, but I need you to be clear about your methods.**" Erratum finally butted back in, seeing things were beginning to escalate. "**What do you mean by muses?**" They redirected again, seeing the two beginning to retract their hostility.

"Do you recall the whispers in your mind of the people in the multiverse?"

Erratum was instantly sick.

"**You created... voices of invisible beings to speak ideas to him?**" They breathed quietly. "**It got out of control, didn't it?**"

"It was supposed to be suggestions and reminders if he forgot an idea. The muses became their own separate entities after a while, commanding and demanding worlds that they pushed into his mind. They won't silence until it has been shaped perfectly."

Erratum placed a hand over their mouth momentarily as they took this in. "**His hand is forced… he has no choice.**" They felt genuine horror at the very idea. It was so similar to their own situation that it made them want to both laugh and cry hysterically. "**And you choose to tell me this *now?!* This would have been useful ages ago! I could have approached this situation so much differently!**" Erratum began to shout once more, absolutely outraged. "**You have to fix it! No one deserves to be forced into a Fate they never asked for!**"

"I cannot fix it from where we are. He would have to be physically in front of me so that I might reshape his mind. This is not like creating things or influencing beings like we can from direct interference. I wouldn't be able to project myself long enough for such an arduous task." Fate continued as the other Guardians began to appear around them. Most of them gave off waves of displeasure, though Time seemed to have already expected this information. *"I know it is late to seek forgiveness for this, but that is all I can ask for. I am aware my original interference has brought us to where we are now, but it is not something that I can take back."*

"You have caused these worlds so much anguish!" Destiny cried out in retaliation. *"Why should we allow you the comfort of forgiveness after everything you have done?!"*

"**Because the majority of you are *no better*.**"

Silence permeated the dark abyss as Erratum effectively silenced them all. "**You all act as though the majority of you have not done the same! For good intentions or not, you have also interfered in the worlds. With Time making a *child* their champion, it becomes increasingly obvious you do not comprehend the fragility of this multiverse! Any slight change can throw things into an absolutely unbalanced mess, which I would have thought you'd understand by now!**" Erratum didn't care that they were virtually scolding the Guardians at this point; they were one just as well and if they could all chastise each other then they sure could do the same. "**This is why Magic disappeared from the Seven! They**

couldn't handle the chaos that had become the multiverse and their own Council! You want to begin throwing blame at one another? Look no further than yourself first!"

The group was silent after this, none of them breathing a word as the words hung in the air. "**Oh I am aware I'm *just* as guilty, but I am at least self-aware enough to have realized now the fault of my own blinding hatred.**" They frowned as they closed their eyes tightly. "**I somehow thought I was the one in charge of running the entire multiverse because there were so many mistakes, *so many* disorganizations that needed fixing. I'm beginning to understand that it isn't up to me to fix everything and that, perhaps, I have become just as bad at trying to control these worlds.**" They looked down at their own hands, the ones that had destroyed an entire world. "**But I will continue to do what I must with careful restraint. I have plenty of others who will see to that.**" They finally smiled after another moment.

"This... has been helpful. I appreciate what you have done, and you should forgive one another for your actions as I forgive you. Despite being celestial beings, we too, are imperfect."

The first thing Erratum noted when they returned to their body was the comfort that surrounded them. As they opened their eyes, they could feel the soft material of the blankets around them and the pillows beneath them. They groaned at the bright light above them, pressing their arm over their eyes to block it out.

"Ayyy, Glitchy!"

Erratum pulled their arm back in alarm, blinking up at the upside-

down face of Fresh hovering above them. "Yo, I was beginning to think you'd never come back, brah! You had us all mad worried." He informed them while his shades displayed 'Phew' on them.

"**I-**" They winced as their throat croaked, thanking Fresh as he handed them a bottle and took a drink. They sat up abruptly and spit it out, glaring at the contents of the bottle. "**What is this vile stuff?!**"

"Don't diss my Moutain Dew, dawg!" Fresh griped as he took the bottle back, thoroughly insulted. "**Bleh... whatever, just... where are the others? There's something I need to discuss. Please gather them here for me.**" They instructed the parasite, who gave them a quick set of finger guns before disappearing. Erratum wiped at their mouth again as they settled into a comfortable sitting position in their little nest. They noticed there was something sitting beside the pillow they had been lying on, and they moved to carefully grab it and hold it in their hand.

It was the symbol of Karma, crafted carefully from a bar of soap. Erratum felt a pulse of warmth in their soul as they took in the simplistic creation. They hoped that meant the troubled monster was opening himself up a little more. They glanced up as they heard footsteps rapidly approaching them, making them quickly brace themselves. They grunted as Blue nearly knocked them over onto their back again as he forced his way onto their makeshift bed.

"Errata! You're okay! You're alive!" He nearly wept as he held onto the god. Erratum gave a soft hum, resting a hand on the back of his head to comfort him. "**I would never leave all of you in such a state. I am so sorry that you all had to see me like that.**"

"Only *you* would apologize for having a mental breakdown after destroying a suffering world." Geno frowned as he stood next to Reaper like a disappointed mother. Erratum couldn't help but smile a bit at the comparison in their mind. "Quit smirking, you're not off the hook." He quickly growled. Dream was the first to sit on the grass in

front of the piles of blankets, giving the other a tense smile. "We're happy you're okay, but... can you explain what exactly happened? You just sort of... glitched out and became unresponsive. I couldn't delve into your dreams or unconscious mind and Fresh explained that you weren't in your body?" They seemed confused the more they tried to explain their question.

"Certainly, and I have important information that I wish to share as well." Erratum agreed as the rest of them settled down to listen to them.

By the time they were done explaining, the majority of them looked shocked and conflicted. Erratum couldn't blame them; it was a lot to take in after what they had all originally believed. **"So... I cannot say that I truly hate him. I know what I said, but I was in so much pain at the time. It was easier to redirect that hurt and guilt onto someone else, but I can see now that we are brothers in suffering."** Erratum spoke it with such pain that the collective group could feel their despair. Erratum noticed that Blue was nearly sweating at this point, while Dream was giving him a hard, expectant look.

"Is something the matter?"

"I don't know, Blue, *is there?"* Dream leaned in as Blue gave a sheepish grin and yanked at their handkerchief. "Right... um... Errata? We uh... well, while you were out, I called an emergency council meeting about everything. Well, I'm not sure how to say this?"

"Little light, you are raising my anxiety to new levels."

"Mweheh..heh.." Blue shifted uncomfortably in their spot. "Well... it's

very possible that, perhaps, maybe... I started a small war?" There was a tense silence as everyone looked at Erratum, afraid of how they would react to this news.

Erratum sat there quietly, slowly letting the information register in their mind.

War.

Ink had declared war upon them and all of those associated with them. How long were they in The Between?!

"Um... E-Errata? You okay?" Blue questioned hesitantly. Erratum stared blankly at him for a moment as the champion grew more and more anxious. Finally, Erratum let the full implications of this news wash over them.

And subsequently crashed.

Chapter End Notes

> Fun revelations, no? You didn't think Ink was just a reckless asshole just for the hell of it, did you?
>
> Oh no, my friend. Ink and Erratum both were dragged into this without any say and left to figure things out on their own. The only difference is Erratum had a mentor in Karma to help them see through the pain. Ink did not.
>
> Now then, let's begin, shall we?

Chapter 22: "Cross"ing paths

Chapter Summary

After a tearful farewell to Geno, Cross takes advantage of Erratum's preoccupation to delve into some worlds. Things get a little... interesting.

Chapter Notes

Has it been over a week already?? My bad, was finishing up my last few 12-hour ICU shifts for my practicum. Finals are in a week then I... graduate? Hello??

ALSO HELLO?? https://www.deviantart.com/vcl2006/art/Errata-s-reaction-be-like-918042746 VCL IS STILL TRYING TO KILL ME?? Erratum's priceless reaction before crashing after hearing about this new war.

I'm amused by the mixed feelings about Ink that have come up now. It's easy to shit on Ink without reason, but I mean, Ink is a victim too. It's suddenly gone from 'stop Ink in any way possible' to 'somehow save Ink from himself'.

I'm sure that'll go well. ◕◕

Enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"I'm afraid..."

"I know, I don't blame you."

After Erratum had been given the full rundown on what happened while they were gone, the god knew they had to start working quickly. The last thing they had wanted was an actual multiversal war, but they were beginning to understand it didn't really matter

what they wanted. Erratum knew with how things were progressing, they needed to tie up loose ends as fast as possible. Geno knew the time had come when the god had successfully found a way to force run his world's story, and despite his eagerness to see his world and brother again, he was terrified.

"You're sure things will be okay? I just... I never thought I would have a semblance of a life after the Save Screen. Now that I have it... I'm afraid I'll lose this too. What if things don't go well? Or I can't handle it? What if I die? What if I don't know how to progress the story right? I know too much now, way more than I was supposed to." Geno looked to Erratum with fear. Erratum rested their hand on the top of his head, and for once, Geno leaned into it instead of pushing them away. "**I assure you, I have scanned through the entirety of your story and you will be okay. You are not going to die, and I will be watching you the entire time. You won't see me, but I will have a one-way portal to your world while you're there. Once it has reached its conclusion, I will come back for you. As for the story, it is within you. Your 'code' is integrated into your world; you will know what to do when you get there.**" They promised the nervous monster. "I know... I know you won't let anything happen." Geno spoke quietly as he clutched onto the front of their robes.

Erratum glanced up at the three other monsters standing nearby. Geno pulled away after a moment, exhaling shakily as he gathered his nerves. "Geno..." Reaper stepped forward and Erratum moved away to let them have their moment. Geno glanced away as Reaper gave him a sad expression, resting a hand on his cheek. "I'll see you soon, my dove, okay?" He soothed him as his wings encircled him gently. Geno flushed faintly at this, giving a small huff as he turned to face the demigod after a moment. He gripped him tightly by the collar of his robe, pulling him down roughly and pressing his mouth against his. Reaper widened his eyes as his wings plumed out in shock at the other's bold move. Geno moved away just as quickly, his hand pulling his scarf up over the majority of his face as he avoided eye contact. Reaper gave a delirious grin as he wavered a bit and attempted to fix his wings again, red traces of dust still visible on the feathers.

"I hope you don't expect the same goodbye." Cross joked, causing

Geno's flustered state to relax a bit. "Nope, that'd be a little weird for us. You're more like... brotherly, you know?" Geno chuckled as Cross gave him a tight squeeze. "Don't make me tear up, asshole." He joked while Geno gave a small laugh. Fresh grinned as he lifted them both off the ground with his hug, much to Geno's voiced displeasure. "Aw, totes lovin' this family vibe! See ya around, Geno!" Fresh chirped before dropping both skeletons back to their feet. Geno huffed as he righted himself again and gave the parasite a glare. "You are, by far, the most obnoxious person I have ever met." He remarked, earning a delighted grin from the parasite. "...Kinda like a pesky younger bro." He finished, causing Fresh's smile to disappear along with the words on his glasses.

"As sweet as this is, I believe we have waited long enough to restart this world." Erratum remarked though they did watch them all with tenderness to their expression. Geno nodded as he stepped forward to the summoned rift back to the horrible black void. He gave a shaky sigh before stepping through it, looking back over his shoulder a moment before walking forward into the vast darkness. Erratum ran their hand over Verse as they brought forward the full timeline they had tirelessly dug up. They gave Geno's retreating form a sad smile before pressing the 'force run' command and closing the rift. Erratum frowned as they settled down again on the ground, opening a new one-way portal to view the world again. They felt relieved to see the world was progressing once more from the beginning of the story. They felt awful knowing the kind of pain both physically and mentally Geno was going through, but they also hoped Frisk being in the save screen would give some sort of comfort.

"I suppose you'll be here for the next few days then?"

"Correct."

"So you'll let me handle things then?" Cross checked as Erratum continued to stare into the open rift.

"Also correct."

Cross was relieved by this assurance and gave a soft sigh of relief. "Good, glad to hear that. I'll be poking my head into a couple of worlds regarding this whole war thing. Once we gather enough people, I'll let you know and you can do your thing. It's better we get everyone on our side to understand how we plan to handle the other side." Erratum simply nodded in agreement, never turning their head from the rift. Cross gave a faint smile as he looked to Fresh, who nodded once and settled down beside Erratum, immediately beginning to chat and rambling on about various topics in his strange lingo. Satisfied that the other would keep them company, Cross disappeared in a spark of golden light to continue his search.

Cross should have known any Chara, no matter the universe, would be stubborn at best. Cross had hoped that after pleading his case the human would understand, but they didn't seem to trust him as far as they could throw him. With Storyshift placing Chara in Sans's place, it only made their personality that much more insufferable.

"Yeah, I don't trust you Sans sorts," Chara remarked carelessly as they appraised Cross with an unimpressed look. "I mean, come on, a holy war? You've gotta know how stupid that sounds." They scoffed as Cross nearly pouted at their remarks; no, he *hadn't* realized how stupid it sounded until then.

"I wouldn't call it *that,* just... a god and a demigod fighting against each other over what to do with the multiverse?" He attempted, though Chara didn't seem too keen on this either. "Okay whatever, it's a war of some sort, but I would like to reemphasize the whole 'mass destruction and melty universe' thing again. Errata just needs people who are powerful and who will *listen* when they try to explain what needs to happen." Cross frowned as Chara appraised their knife with a bored expression on their face. "Yeah, no, I'm good. If they're really all that great, then they can take care of it themselves." They shrugged

despite the proposed danger Cross had brought.

Cross could have strangled the aloof human if not for the sudden shift in the atmosphere that had even Chara perking up in alarm. They properly armed themselves with their knife as the familiar forms of Killer and Nightmare became visible from a swirl of darkness. Nightmare appraised the both of them with little interest as he took notice of their presence. "Only one of their little followers? I doubt you'll put up much of a fight without calling out for your little god." He sneered before his face shifted into one of confusion. "You... are their champion as well?"

"Did you really expect Errata to stop at one?" Cross huffed back as he summoned twin blades into his hands with a glower. He knew the other was attempting to provoke him into fighting without calling for Erratum, but little did Nightmare know that the other was occupied at the moment. Still, Cross wasn't going to let Nightmare think the god wouldn't come and dispel that threat from the encounter. "I would suggest you take your henchmen and walk right back out the way you came." He openly threatened the two of them while Chara fell in beside him with an equally dangerous expression on their face. Killer seemed unphased as he pretended to swoon and leaned into Nightmare. "Such a shame we didn't get to him first, Boss! I thought he was a stick in the mud, but I bet he's a *lot* of fun." Nightmare shoved the monster away with his tendrils, which stood poised over the taunting monster in a warning. Chara didn't hesitate when they saw the two thoroughly distracted, their arm arching their blade in a perfect slice that cut through the air like a sonic boom. Both Killer and Nightmare were knocked backward by it, while Cross braced himself a bit firmer to the ground as the shockwaves buffeted him.

"*This* is why you Sans types piss me off so much," Chara growled as Killer picked themselves back up off the ground and launched at the human. "Oh, I get it, you've got a personal strife, don't ya?" Chara smirked at the expression on Killer's face. "You get conned by another version of me? By the looks of your soul-" They quickly dodged a vicious stab in their direction. "Ah, that one gets under your skin I see. Heh, get it?" Cross could tell that the human had Killer's full attention in this fight, which left them...

"Guess it's you and me, Cross." Nightmare smirked as his tendrils flicked and lashed in sadistic delight. Cross briefly felt a pulse from the locket on their neck and gave a slow exhale to steel himself. He didn't bother to respond to the spirit, though his glare told him everything he wasn't saying. Cross sliced through the first appendage that swung his way, finding satisfaction in the outraged hiss of pain it brought from Nightmare as it retreated backward. Cross took his retreat as an opportunity to advance, sidestepping and dodging attacks with the grace of a veteran fighter. He was completely at home in the fray of battle, and without the hyperawareness of Erratum on the field, he was completely zoned in on Nightmare. The spirit seemed to become aware of Cross's abilities as he tried to take the fight back to a more ranged distance. Cross only pursued further as he maneuvered and slid between thrashing and slashing tendrils to deliver a decent slice with his blade across his chest. Nightmare gave a pained shout as one tendril managed to snag his ankle and pull him away, slamming him against the ground with excessive force. Cross grunted in pain but refused to cry out as his spine throbbed in protest at the treatment.

Nightmare wheezed a bit as the dark, thick tar dripped from his body a moment in a struggle to stay solidified. "I wondered what hitting you with Errata's concentrated magic would do." Nightmare looked up sharply as Cross got to his feet, both blades glowing a bright golden colour in his hands. Nightmare understood now why the attack affected him much stronger than he had originally expected. "That just means I need to kill you now rather than later. Perhaps you would make a fun hostage, but I think it would cripple your god if I simply snuffed the life out of you." Nightmare grinned viciously as dozens of sharpened tendrils raced out to meet Cross. Cross stared on in shock at the incoming attack, briefly caught off guard and cursing as he tried to decide how to dodge this. Left? Right? Which one would cause less damage? He couldn't figure it out.

So he went both ways.

Cross stumbled to the side as he dodged, staring wide-eyed at the impaled ground where he once stood. As the tendrils retreated back to their owner, Cross stared on with shock at the sight that he was left with. "What are you doing here?!"

"I have no idea but I'm not gonna complain!"

Cross stared in amazement as Chara, *his* Chara, stood on the other side of the impaled ground. Their black and white attire was the same as the last time he had seen them in the flesh, and they were wielding the giant glowing blade Cross remembered using quite often. The guard noted silently that they appeared to have a trace of gold down the left of their face, but he would focus more on this whole bizarre event later. Cross glanced down and noticed his locket appeared to have been altered as well. The full heart locket was now a broken half of a heart, much like the 'best friends' heart pieces children would have with their friends. He was left further amazed, and entirely confused, about what this champion lifestyle had brought him.

"Okay, *now* we're getting interesting!" This universe's Chara (how does Erratum keep up with all these alternates?!) remarked as they played keep-away with Killer's knife, who was spewing insults and hurling bones at them. Nightmare appeared visibly surprised as well at the sudden change in enemies, tendrils curling and flicking as he observed the battlefield. "You champions are always pulling out new annoying tricks." He growled as Cross continued to stand firm against his assault. Pulling another Chara into the battle only made things more difficult, and as things were going now, it was already becoming embarrassing for the spirit.

"Boss! They took my knife!" Killer half shouted, half whined as both Chara's exchanged a snicker with one another. Killer attempted to impale the newly summoned human with a few well-placed bones, but they merely deflected them off their blade before nearly cutting into the enraged monster with their large blade. "QUIET!" Nightmare snapped at his childish lackey before lashing out at Cross again. Cross swore as he jolted to the left to dodge the strike, which caused his Chara to jerk to the left as well and stumble. "Agh, you gotta work

with me here, Cross!" They shouted as they both experimentally pulled on whatever invisible teether kept them from separating too far. This earned Cross another powerful slam in the side by one of Nightmare's tendrils, sending him *and* Chara both skidding across the ground unceremoniously.

"I have to do everything myself..." Shift Chara sighed as they turned to Killer abruptly, causing the monster pursuing them to attempt to bring themselves to a halt. Chara simply grinned and grasped the exposed soul at his chest, causing the skeleton to choke on a gasp as they brought the tip of their blade to the center of it. "It's a perfect target shape, you know? You think I can hit a bullseye from here?" They twisted the knife slowly, letting the cold steel barely scrape the quivering soul, but it was still enough to cause Killer to drop to his knees and scream. All other fighting came to a screeching halt as Chara met Nightmare's cyan eye. "I wouldn't make any sudden moves. My hand might just... *slip*."

Nightmare's tendrils retreated to his side again, curling in on each other as he kept his eye trained on the tip of the knife connecting to Killer's soul. "Good, I can see I have your attention." The human smirked as they appraised every small change in the spirit's expression. "Now... I could easily just kill him right now, wouldn't think anything of it. You all came into *my* world and started all of this. You fucked around, and you found out. I'm feeling a little merciful today, lucky for you, so here's how this is gonna go. You're gonna take your little friend here, and you're both gonna get the hell out of my world *permanently*." They demanded of him without a trace of hesitation as the knife nicked the soul in their hand, causing Killer to give a pained howl. "Or-"

"Stop!"

Chara rose a brow as Nightmare called out to them, waiting patiently for his response. "Oh? I haven't even given you all of your options yet." They mocked him, causing the spirit to clench their jaw harder. "Just... let him go. We'll leave." Nightmare bargained, much to Cross's surprise. Apparently, Killer's as well as he turned his head in his

leader's direction with a pained sound of confusion. Chara huffed as they delivered a hard kick to Killer's side, causing him to sprawl forward with a pained sound. "Come get him then. No funny business, or else." They squeezed the soul in their hand as Killer choked into the ground. "Stop, stop!" Nightmare hissed as he moved to crouch beside his downed comrade, tendrils moving to form a barrier between Chara's line of sight and Killer. Chara waited until Nightmare opened a swirling portal behind him, and only then did they toss the soul back with feigned disinterest. Nightmare quickly caught it in one tendril before locking their eye on them with murderous intent. He hesitated for only a moment before disappearing back into the portal with Killer.

With that, Shift Chara sighed with relief and studied their new knife. "Well, that was annoying." They remarked as Cross and his Chara approached them. "Gotta say, maybe you're not so bad for a Sans. Especially if you've got someone like that keeping you in check." They remarked as Cross's Chara (seriously, how did Erratum do this??) smirked and looked at Cross smugly. Cross rolled his eyelights but said nothing, knowing it was useless to argue. He also noted silently that his Chara had the opposite half heart locket piece as he had suspected. "Tell you what," Cross looked back to Shift Chara as they pocketed the new knife. "Come talk to me sometime soon and bring this 'god' person with you too. I'll see for myself who this supposed god is and what they expect me to do, but I'm not saying I'll join your cause." Cross sighed with relief and slumped a bit as exhaustion caught up with him. He jolted as the invisible teether dragged him back to his Chara, who phased back into him without any warning. Cross patted himself down a moment to make sure he was still in one piece, hands stopping at his now full heart locket.

"That's gotta be weird to live with."

"You know... it's not the weirdest thing by my standards."

It had been two agonizing days of Erratum watching Geno's universe without a single break. Fresh was good at being a distraction, but even he had his limits on what he could deal with. The parasite groaned as he leaned against Erratum more, who merely shifted a bit to accommodate his weight as they sat quietly in front of the portal. "When's he gonna be done? It's mad boring! Cross thinks my shenanigans are funny and your confusion isn't as fun as Geno's annoyance!" Fresh complained loudly as his shades shifted to 'BORED'.

"It's okay to say that you miss him." Fresh blinked up at the god as they spoke for the first time in quite a while. Erratum turned their head down to peer at the pestering virus inhabitant with a trace of amusement and exhaustion. "**He'll be fine, I promise you. The story is almost complete now, and then I can finally step back into his world and fix the coding locking it away. He'll be able to move between universes without dying, which is a benefit that outweighs the risks of what we're doing.**" They explained to him with a reassuring smile on their face. "Heh, if you say so broski. I trust you know what you're doin'." Fresh assured with a thumbs up, to which Erratum simply huffed a soft laugh in response.

"Ya know,"

Erratum perked up a moment, sensing the change in tone and atmosphere. Fresh slipped his shades off a moment, frowning as he studied the blank lenses. "It's kinda wild how different things have been here, ya know? Usually, I'm chased out after snatchin' my newest body cause I wreck the world, ya know? But, you're like the exact opposite. You don't want me to leave." Erratum didn't mention how they *couldn't* let him leave considering said snatching habits, but they could tell this wasn't the time to say it. "Dunno, kinda rad, ya know? It's like havin' a weird little squad that likes t' kick it with ya." He grinned a bit at the god's confused expression. "People who wanna hang around ya."

"We do 'like to kick it with you', Fresh."

Fresh gave a hearty laugh at this, resting his arm over his eyes as he struggled to breathe between laughs. Erratum smiled to themselves, allowing themselves to be the fool in the situation to bring a bit of lightheartedness to the conversation. **"In all seriousness, you are wanted here Fresh. Do you... not realize that?"** The god's face morphed into one of slight concern as Fresh caught his breath and grinned. "Hm? Aw, you a real O.G, for real Errata, but I know it ain't like that. You gotta keep me here so I don't take any more hosts. I can only survive here since the soul I'm munchin' on can't deteriorate when there's no time."

A horrendous thought, Erratum realized, as they spotted the heart-shaped object in his eye. It looked intact and pristine, which suggested the other had stumbled across Erratum's plane not long after securing a new host. **"Perhaps in the beginning it was for safety reasons, but you have been here quite a while. You've formed bonds with the people here whether you were aware of it or not. In a strange way, I've seen you from the moment you became a virus in a random universe to what you are now. It's hard not to have some fondness, skipping past the parasitic tendencies and body horror, for you."**

Fresh frowned as he watched the god with obvious confusion on his face. "Brah, I don't get you. But hey, suit yourself I guess. It's like havin' an omnipotent parent, but one that doesn't like go through your phone even though they could, ya know?"

Erratum did not know. Erratum didn't know *at all,* but they think they understood the sentiment the other was getting at.

"I get it though, I do. Your crib is pretty dope, so I don't mind being trapped here." Fresh assured them with a grin back on his face. Erratum frowned as they looked from the portal in front of them back to Fresh. **"How long have you had this host?"** Fresh blinked up at

them at the question. "Well, since I've been here? Maybe a couple of days before I got here?" Fresh attempted to recall, though it was hard to do when time didn't really mean much here. "**Is that universe still intact? Do you even remember what universe it was?**" Erratum frowned as they scanned his face for any signs of deception. "Mmm, nope! And nope. Whatever it was, it's a wasteland now. My bad." He didn't *sound* remorseful. Erratum steepled their hands and leaned their head forward a bit in thought.

"**I really, really should consider not doing this.**" Erratum spoke as they glanced back at the confused parasite. "**But I'm going to lean into my morally grey alignment here as an excuse. If you keep going through worlds to take hosts, more worlds will be thrown off trajectory and potentially corrupt. Whatever world that body came from is completely unsalvagable by this point, and your form is stable and viable. That's... a good enough reason to do this, right? Binding you to this soul to prevent the destruction of many others?**" It was an extremely flimsy excuse, but Erratum still felt the need to justify themselves. "I'll be honest, I ain't followin' ya." Fresh commented as he observed the conflicted expression on Erratum's face.

"**I'm deciding the bond your virus into the code of the soul you stole. I'd have to detach the sentient presence of the other Sans, but honestly, it's probably more merciful for me to do that anyway.**" Erratum commented as Fresh sat up abruptly. "That sounds... wicked messed up, I'll be honest."

"**Hence my hesitation to do so. The soul is doomed regardless, so there isn't much to be done about it in the first place. I'm doing my best to make this work without encroaching on Reaper's domain here.**" Erratum hummed as they thought about the implications of this action. "**It's not really death if the body and soul don't die, right? This should be fine, it's just codes and numbers. Nothing-**"

"You'd do that for me?"

Erratum paused their moral conflict at the question. Fresh was staring at them with a mixture of confusion and what the god suspected was poorly suppressed hope. "**Fresh, I've done far more preposterous things for other people. If we subtract the doomed universe, I see this as a win-win situation.**" They insisted as though it weren't anything special. Fresh frowned further as he tried to decipher any hidden intent behind the proposal. "You're sure about this? Don't get me wrong, I'm down, but... ya know. People won't look too favourably on this, I don't have stellar reviews with a lot of 'em." He reminded the god.

"**This concerns me because...?**"

"I mean you're the one out here trying to recruit people, yeah? I'd be harshin' the vibes on that." Fresh replied, to which Erratum hummed in acknowledgment. "**I understand your point, but if I am going to have people on my side, then I want them to support my decisions as well. People are free to disagree with me, but at the very least, they must support my followers as well. More than that,**" Erratum placed a hand on Fresh's head, making sure the other was paying full attention to them. "**You, Cross, Geno... you've resided with me in my plane for quite a while. All of you I consider as good as family, I hope you understand that.**"

Fresh was silent as he took in this information, and Erratum gave him the time to absorb it all. They knew Fresh had a difficult time understanding a lot of emotions, he more survived on animalistic instinct as a parasite would, but they knew the other could comprehend them with some time. Fresh leaned forward uncertainly, pausing as he glanced up at Erratum for any signs that they were uncomfortable. When he was met with the same stare as always, he pressed his forehead against their chest and wrapped shaking arms around their middle. Erratum rumbled a soft laugh as they placed a firm hand in the center of his back.

"**I know Fresh... I know.**"

Killer cringed as Nightmare handled his soul with the utmost care. He was lying back against his bed, breaths coming in soft wheezes at the pulse of pain in his soul from the small cut it received. Nightmare had it held close to his face as he observed the surface, silently cursing his slightly impaired vision as he scanned it over. It didn't appear too severe, just a little knick as he had suspected. Still, it didn't hurt to give it a full check over since injuries to the soul were no joke.

"Hey, Boss,"

Nightmare looked up from the soul at Killer's weak voice, appraising him silently as he waited for him to speak again. "Why'd you... why'd you do that? You coulda one-shot that little bitch once you were that close, I'm sure of it. You got deadly precise aim." The wounded skeleton chuckled weakly with a faint wince. Nightmare narrowed his eye at him with fizzling irritation in the core of his being. He wasn't too sure himself because he *knew* the other was right. Once they had gotten Killer's soul, they could have easily taken them out in vengeance.

"I didn't want to take that risk."

Nightmare appeared surprised by the words that came out of his own mouth, as though he hadn't expected them at all. Killer gave him a similar look of surprise, though he quickly attempted to play it off as he gave a smug grin. "Aw, I knew you cared deep down in your inky heart." He teased the spirit, as though he didn't currently hold the very core of his being and could shatter it with a tightening of his grip. Nightmare rolled his eyelight with an exasperated sigh as he replaced the soul back in its normal floating position. "You'll live, sadly."

"Come on, Boss, you know you'd miss me if I dusted."

"You would serve no use to me as dust." Nightmare responded dryly at the other's insistent teasing. "Though it would only be a slight downgrade if I really consider it." He added on, causing the other to full-on pout in response. "At least I actually came to help you. I didn't see Dust or Horror scrambling to assist you in today's raid." He reminded him, which only caused Nightmare to distance himself further with a cold stare. "So I'm aware." He remarked with a glance over to the open doorway of Killer's room. Both mentioned monsters retreated even further behind either edge of the doorframe at the intense glare. Killer sighed as he closed his eyes, feeling the sting in his soul with every beat it gave. "How long is this gonna take to heal up?"

"Horror will prepare you a separate meal with what healing magic we have access to. It isn't much, but it should ease the pain at the very least." Nightmare replied without taking his eyes off of the two in the doorway. Taking the hint, Horror disappeared entirely from the doorframe to return back to his kitchen, dragging Dust along by the edge of his sleeve.

Nightmare thought he caught a quick flash of gold, but ignored it as he stood from Killer's bed. "I expect you to lie in this bed until morning. I will reevaluate your condition then and see where we will go from there." He instructed him, to which Killer gave a weak, playful salute in response. Nightmare shook his head before heading to exit Killer's room entirely.

"Hey... Boss?"

Nightmare paused in the doorway, turning his head back to look at the wounded monster. Seeing him sitting up in bed, he bit back the immediate need to scold him for *immediately* disobeying his direct order. The contemplative look on Killer's face made him pause, however, as he seemed to search for the words to say.

"...Thank you."

Nightmare visibly jolted, if only slightly, but it was enough for Killer to detect. He said nothing of it, but Nightmare did his best to steel himself once more in an attempt to downplay his immediate reaction. "Just keep yourself from getting into these situations. You're a skilled opponent, but your weak point is out for display at all times. If you get cocky on the battlefield, you leave yourself open for fatal mistakes." He could see Killer shrink in a bit at the response, but the other needed to hear this. "And, you're welcome."

With that, Nightmare turned to fully exit the room, closing the door quietly behind him as he did. He exhaled the breath he had been holding after a few moments of blissful quiet, slumping forward a bit. He eventually peeled himself away from the closed door to head toward the kitchen to see to it that Horror was following his silent request. He paused a moment at the wall of mirrors he passed on his way through the corridor to the grand stairs. He wasn't sure why, but he felt compelled to at least linger for a moment. He approached one of the lengthy mirrors after a moment of inaction, considering his appearance as he placed a hand on the smooth glass.

He stared into the reflection in the mirror.

Nightmare stared right back.

Chapter End Notes

> The Cross and Xtale!Chara split power was one I was excited about. I'm sorry if you don't like it but I was so proud of that little revelation I had randomly about a week ago. Why yes, some of this stuff is literally decided upon mere days to moments before being written. Just because I know how the story ends doesn't mean I know what the hell I'm doing at this moment in time.
>
> Also, poor Killer, he got hardcore bullied.

And little bonding moments are always nice. Setting up a gradual buildup, don't you worry. I know I seem to write a lot of filler, but each interaction is significant in world-building and justifying relationships and actions others would take for the people they're associated with. Plus, I can't help myself. Once again, this is a self-indulgent fix-it of sorts to show love to tormented au characters.

Chapter 23: A Drink of paint

Chapter Summary

Erratum checks on Geno at the end of his story and shares another tender moment with all of their boys. A few days later, Dream sits down with the chill god to have a hard conversation.

Chapter Notes

Welcome back to my madness. I'm so exhausted but I am here writing anyway because it's the only thing that brings me joy. Hope everyone is doing well, too! I'm glad everyone could sob over Fresh as I did.

Also, ONCE AGAIN, AS PROMISED BY THE GREAT VCL THEMSELVES, ANOTHER ART PIECE TO TRY AND KILL ME.
https://www.deviantart.com/vcl2006/art/What-do-you-mean-I-can-t-adopt-them-918402906
Momrrata cannon?
Dadmare and Momrrata. P e r f e c t i o n.

Enjoy

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Look! It even fixed your- Euugh...oh."

"Heh, don't worry, I've gotten used to it." Geno grinned a bit as Papyrus made a sound of displeasure. "No no! It's not that bad! I hardly notice it!" Papyrus quickly backtracked, which only served to make Geno laugh with a shake of his head. "Nah, it's fine. Kinda been beaten into submission over the topic. Plus, I'm pretty certain they're watching and I will catch hell if I make a negative remark on myself."

"Uhhh... *who's* watching?" Sans questioned with a hint of anxiety while Frisk stood nearby in confusion. "Don't worry, give it a minute." Geno assured as he continued to look out over the sunset with a faint smile. He couldn't believe it had been as simple as *eating a damn pie.* The difference between life and death had been a, rather tasty he would admit, piece of pastry. He allowed the thought to drift away as he heard the rift in reality open up from behind. "Heh, took your time."

"As though I would forget you."

Geno turned around to face them, looking quite surprised to see a few others with them. Cross gave him a small wave while Fresh gave him a set of finger guns with a wide grin. "I thought he was grounded?" He frowned with a suspicious look.

"HOW MANY BROTHERS DO I HAVE???" Papyrus shouted as his hands grasped either side of his skull.

"His... condition... has been fixed," Erratum assured with a quick glance over to the other inhabitants nearby. **"My apologies, these monsters are from different alternate realities to this one. They aren't from this world."** They did their best to explain. "You can just... do that? Move between realities?" Sans questioned as he examined this strange new being, who gave a soft laugh in response. Sans didn't see what was so funny, but Geno rested a hand on his shoulder with a grin.

"This is Errata, Guardian of Order. Basically, they're a god." Geno said it so matter-of-factly while Sans was busy trying to comprehend the complexity of that. "Okay??" He managed after a moment of confusion. "That's... definitely something." He remarked as he suddenly felt extremely intimidated by all of these new monsters. "Yeah, it's a lot to take in. I don't even have the time to explain everything that's happened to me." Geno chuckled a bit as he squeezed Sans's shoulder in reassurance.

"Geno,"

Said monster tensed a bit as a faint flush rose to his face. He glanced over with his eye widened at the call, and Erratum stepped aside to allow the demigod through. "**I'm pretty sure, deity laws or not, he would have reaped my soul if I didn't alert him when we were coming to see you.**" The god explained as Reaper hovered to Geno, while Sans backed up immediately at the sight of what was basically the Grim Reaper. Geno groaned in embarrassment as he pulled his scarf up under his nasal aperture to try and hide. Reaper trilled as he enveloped him in his wings with a pleased smile regardless.

"Erm... sooooo...?" Sans spoke up after a moment of silence, giving Geno a confused look. Geno flushed a bit more as he pulled his scarf down to properly speak. "Right, this uh... this is Reaper, yes he reaps souls so let's address the elephant in the room first." He immediately explained. "He uh... I'm, well, I mean *we*...?" He glanced at Reaper for a moment as he tried to find the right words to say. "He's my partner, I guess that's the way to put it?" This seemed to please Reaper as his feathers ruffled around him.

Sans continued to stare at him for a moment at this revelation. "So... I guess you really *did* have a date with death, huh?" He grinned with a wink at him. Geno couldn't even appreciate the pun as he buried his head in his hands while Reaper laughed. "Heh heh, well, glad he makes you happy? I'll be honest, this is very strange." He admitted. "There is no part about my life that isn't strange, trust me," Geno assured with a weary sigh. Reaper moved to release him after a moment, standing aside so Erratum could approach. Geno rolled his eyes as he leaned his head forward a bit, allowing the god to place their hand on the top of their head.

"I'm sorry it took as long as it did to get your world fixed, but I am more than happy to see that it has a happy ending. Resets do not exist past this point, so you are free to live your life without the looming threat." Erratum assured him, getting a joyful grin in

response. "Wait, you're serious?" Sans checked as he looked from Frisk back to Errata. "No more resets, ever, right? No jumping back to the beginning?" He had to be sure he understood correctly. "**That's correct. This timeline had a definitive endpoint in the story. Jumping back to the beginning when there are two of you here would be... messy anyway.**" They had a passing thought of the conjoined monsters they had seen but pushed it down into their mind to lock it away. Sans seemed to deflate with relief as he leaned against Papyrus, who didn't seem to understand but was happy everyone else was happy.

"Errata, I don't know how to thank you enough. I know I might not be around all the time like I was, but-" Geno huffed a bit in surprise as the god pulled him in close to embrace him. "**You can travel freely between universes without dusting now. Your determination allows you more power to do so than most Sanses, and I'm certain Reaper is more than eager to show you how. You are always free to drop in at any time. You will always be family to me.**" Geno pressed his face further into their chest with a pathetic sound. "*Damn you* and your *words.*" He choked, slightly muffled in the material of their robe. The god merely smiled and held onto him tightly, reveling in the knowledge the other was happy. Soon, Cross and Fresh were nudging their way into the embrace with matching grins. Errata felt a sense of peace in their soul they hadn't felt in quite a long time.

They all looked up in alarm at the sound of footsteps rushing toward them. Undyne soon appeared from up the mountain pathway, shouting something about a movie. She paused as she took in the scene, glancing around at all the skeletons in the area. Geno's grin tensed as he began to sweat at the expression on her face. "Uh... hi...?"

"SANS, *WHAT THE HELL*??"

"Language..."

Dream had been anxious all day.

He had to spend several hours pacing and giving himself a pep talk to convince himself to go through with what he had planned. The moment he stepped into Erratum's plane, however, he instantly found all that gathered nerve fleeing him. He could see the god resting at their altar as they normally did and he was certain the other was aware of his presence. They must be waiting for him to approach, but Dream felt his knees lock up as he thought about it.

"Hey Dream!"

The positive spirit perked up a bit as Cross came to greet him, smiling a bit easier as the champion held his hand out for him. Dream grasped his hand in a friendly gesture, giving him the same smile he gave everyone. "Hello Cross, I hope you've been well?" He replied pleasantly to the guard. "Now that Geno's doing better and Fresh is well? Yeah, it's been pretty good." Dream blinked in confusion at this, tilting his head slightly. "Fresh?" He questioned curiously. "Oh, right. Errata... uh, how did they explain it? Combined his parasite form with the soul's code? Smooshed them together? Shoved the soul into him? It's... I'll be honest I still don't understand." Cross admitted as he rubbed the back of his neck, causing Dream to cover his mouth and giggle. "So, he's got a permanent body then? No more stealing bodies?" He questioned to progress the conversation along. "Nope, he's good to go, which means he can leave if he wants to, but I think he likes hanging around. So yeah, things are pretty good, all things considered." He frowned after another moment. Dream felt a small squeeze in his soul at the reminder of the ongoing conflict. "Right... I wanted to speak to Errata about that, actually." He informed him, to which Cross gave him a curious look but nodded. "Sure thing, just go talk to them. You don't have to schedule an appointment." He teased him as he pushed him forward a bit insistently. Dream laughed a bit at the gesture before reluctantly moving to approach the settled Guardian. He instantly felt his nerves alight with anxiety once more as he paused a few feet away, hands wringing together nervously.

"**Your fear is practically palatable, Dream.**" The spirit jolted a bit as Erratum cracked one eye open to appraise him. "**You come here seeking counsel or for a listening ear?**" They questioned as Dream settled on their knees in front of them. It had taken a while for the god to assure him that the entire deity greeting thing was entirely unnecessary, especially in private company. "Well... I-I wanted to talk about this whole war thing." He started, to which Erratum's face contorted into one of sorrow. "**I had assumed you would at some point. It is not my want for there to be any conflict, and with any luck, I can help prevent any actual fighting between universes. I actually plan to speak to the creator sometime soon about keeping the conflict between us. I would have a better chance of getting through to him if he didn't feel persecuted.**" Which, to be fair, Erratum was aware that this was exactly the issue at hand. Ink had become a target of animosity and accusations due to his role in their universes which, ultimately, led people to expect him to take the blame for everything in them.

Erratum knew they were just as guilty for this assumption, as well as a prejudiced view of him for his soulless state. They had resolved that struggle themselves after messing with the shattered pieces of Ink's soul, however, but their original stance on it had spearheaded their own followers' opinions upon it. They knew they needed to fix this, but with them also attempting to find a solution to helping Ink *and* the multiverse, they were feeling quite overwhelmed.

"Right, so, you don't really have like... hatred for Ink? You don't want to punish him or something?" Dream ventured with a worried expression. "**Absolutely not. I've been bigoted enough the way it is. I thought I was his Karma for his actions, but I believe I've been looking at Karma very one-sided.**" Erratum explained to him. "**Karma isn't always negative. There is good Karma as well, and perhaps because I am always dealing with the bad kind, I forget the good still exists. Good intent breeds good Karma, and I do believe in the beginning, that he had good intentions. Even now, despite it all, I don't believe any of this is malicious intent. Not only this but can Ink really be put to blame for a lot of actions? I feel like... he doesn't really understand. Concepts like death can be hard to comprehend when nothing seems**

permanent to you as an immortal being. He didn't have someone like I did. Karma was there for me when all of this deity stuff was thrust upon me." Dream was hanging onto their words as they spoke, seeming to gain something from it. **"He needs guidance, not fixing. I think that is ultimately where I've gone wrong."**

Dream let out a long sigh as he took in their words. "We all make mistakes, none of us are infallible. I think it's very becoming of a Guardian to admit to their faults." He smiled at them before looking down at the ground again in thought. "So... I feel less guilty when I tell you this..." He still felt trepidatious about having this conversation, but they had to do it! They had to be strong!

"You want to go back to him."

Dream looked up sharply at this, shocked as he stared into Erratum's knowing eyes. **"You understand him more after all of this has come to light and you know he has never *truly* meant you any harm. Ink favoured you so much when he made your world, even if it went poorly in the end due to it. I don't believe Ink would ever want to hurt you, Dream, not intentionally. In the end, I think you're the only one he truly trusted. He really needs someone like you on his side right now."** The god nodded to him once in approval at the unspoken request. Dream slumped his shoulders a bit with a weak smile. "You're not... mad? Upset that I'm basically turning my back on you?"

"Is that what you consider it? Do you plan to fight me or keep me from helping?"

"Of course not!" Dream insisted quickly. "I know we want the same thing, Errata, I just... that's what it feels like I'm doing." He sighed miserably. "It feels like any decision I make is gonna be the wrong one..." Erratum placed a comforting hand on his shoulder with a heavy sigh. **"I understand... I understand that *far* too well. I assure you, however, that you aren't betraying anyone. I will explain it to the**

others as well so they might understand too."

"I'd appreciate that. I think it would sound better coming from you, and... I don't know if I could tell them all of this to their faces." Dream admitted with a flash of shame. He knew that Erratum would articulate everything perfectly to the others, however, where he's certain he would trip up and stumble trying to explain. "Anyway, thank you for being open-minded about this. I appreciate that you listen to me and don't condemn me." He sighed. **"I believe most of my condemning days are over. Unless it comes to serious matters, I'd rather it not come to that."** Erratum assured him.

"Well, I'm just glad you're so understanding." Dream glanced up at them again with an uncertain expression. "You don't... think different of me, right?" He had to check and he knew the other would be straightforward with him. Erratum seemed perplexed by the question, the spirit could tell by the squint of their eyes and the tilt of their head. **"Of course, I don't. You are perfectly capable of making your own choices, Dream. You don't have to get my approval for anything, I sure hope you know that. Just as I've said to my other boys, you will always have a family in me if you should so need it."** Dream appeared overjoyed at this, wrapping his arms around Erratum's neck and nearly pulling them down as he squeezed them tightly. "Thank you! I thought you'd say as much, but, I had to be sure." He beamed at the god as he released them before getting back to his feet. "I'll still pop by when I can, I promise!" Dream called out to them before opening a portal back out. Erratum gave him a wave as he left, smiling to themselves quietly.

Dream shuffled nervously after stepping through the portal into the Doodlesphere. He knew Ink would sense him there pretty soon, so he only had a few minutes, at best, to prepare himself. He didn't know how the other would react to seeing him again. Dream had walked out of their last council meeting after Ink had crippled Erratum for three entire days. He thought he was doing the right thing by distancing himself from the conflict, but he didn't think he'd be able to avoid getting involved in the end. Perhaps if he was by Ink's side, he could

attempt to be the rational one in the situation. There was only one potential problem; Ink was a wildcard. There was no way for Dream to gauge how the other would react until after everything was said and done.

The sound of papers scattering had Dream looking up and snapping out of his worrying thoughts. Ink soon appeared from somewhere above, probably having been checking over his worlds, dropping down onto the ground with a blank expression on his face. His eyes cycled through several shapes as he stared at Dream, trying to assess why he was here.

"You came back."

Dream rubbed his arm nervously as he looked away from him. "Yeah... I did." He replied quietly, unsure how else to respond. "Ink... I don't think you're a bad person." He spoke again after the silence grew too uncomfortable. "I...I thought you were just carelessly making worlds because you could...but... I don't think that's the case." He knew for a fact it *wasn't* if Erratum's speech about their stay in The Between was to be believed. "I know... I know you don't have a soul," He could see the other jolt just the slightest bit at the statement. "But I know you use your paints to stimulate an emotional response. How you respond when you take all of them... is that really any different than having an emotion evoked from a normal monster? Doesn't each emotion come naturally when the situation arises? Does it really matter if it's from a soul or from a vial?" He looked up at Ink, seeing he was still paying attention to him, though Dream couldn't tell what he was thinking nor feeling. "I know we can make this work, Ink. We can come to a solution with as little violence as possible. The others that are getting involved? They're all mortals... we can't expect them to fight, Ink. They're not like us, and we can't let them die outside of their own universes. We don't know the implications of that." He was wringing his hands together again, anxious about how the other was taking this.

"I'm sorry I said that."

Dream paused his speech at this. "I... what?" He questioned, uncertain what the other was talking about. Ink frowned as he looked off to the side and away from Dream for the first time. "What I said, back in the council. That... you're only motive was to get your brother back. The implication that you'd betray us if it meant you could. I know that isn't true... I shouldn't have said it." His tone was quiet, and while he was normally quite reserved, he seemed to be open with the spirit now. Dream exhaled slowly as he gave the other a sad smile. "I know, Ink... I know you didn't mean it, but it did hurt. I try really hard to keep things together, both balance-wise and mentally, and I don't think people really appreciate that. I don't think people know how hard we all work and what we have to go through as deities. It's... a lot. Every deity has so much pressure on their shoulders that I'm shocked the majority of us haven't cracked under the pressure yet. I think I've been close a few times." He admitted solemnly.

"Yeah... I think I was too." Dream seemed surprised by Ink's confession but didn't address it for fear of him lashing out or pulling back. Instead, he took a few more steps toward him with a gentle smile on his face. "Well... I think we were always better keeping each other in check when we were together." He gave him a hopeful look, scrunching his shoulder a bit and ducking his head slightly. Ink looked him over a moment, seeming to truly consider the other's words as he did so. Dream did his best not to flinch when Ink moved his hands, watching as they moved to retrieve two vials. He wasn't sure what the colours meant, but the yellows and pinks looked pretty in their vials. The artist took two small tastes of the paints before replacing them back in his sash. After a few steady moments, his eyelights shifted back to more colourful arrays as his face lit up.

"You mean it then? You'll stay?" Ink grinned, causing Dream to breathe silently in relief. "Yes Ink, I mean it. Goodness knows what you've been doing on your own all this time. I bet the base is a mess too! Can you even open the front door or do you have to portal in?" The spirit gave him a knowing look while Ink just gave a sheepish shrug. Dream gave a small surprised gasp as Ink pulled him up off his feet and lifted him a bit, as if holding up an art piece to admire. "Whatever! You like cleaning anyway! It'll be fun! You'll sweep, and I'll sit on the couch and watch you!" He insisted, drawing a laugh from the positive spirit at the artist's antics.

"Okay Ink, whatever you say." He felt if he concentrated enough, he could *almost* feel the joy radiating from the artist. Watching how he held onto him and talked in that fast, excited tone, Dream really didn't think Ink was so much different than any other monster, after all.

Soul or not.

Chapter End Notes

whOOPS. This somehow turned even gayer than the last chapter?? This was supposed to have way more serious topics but like... Dream happened??? I'll just have to body slam you all with the next chapter.

How's it feel to not be deceived by the author on Ink's situation and actually glimpsing at him? Lmao, the author is unreliable.

Man, it's gonna be a whiplash, lmao.

Anyway, shorter chapter (3500 words is short for me lmao) to put Dream right back where he belongs. No one trusted Ink to be his own commander in war, right? That would be a disaster.

Chapter 24: White out

Chapter Summary

Erratum travels (after a small, inTemmiedating problem) to speak with the creator.

Chapter Notes

That title isn't alarming, right?

Had my ceremony for graduating and it doesn't feel quite real.

alSO? https://www.deviantart.com/vcl2006/art/Grey-and-Gold-918611591 VCL MADE AN IMAGE FROM CHAPTER 11: CHECKMATE?? Erratum's little smug face after beating Nightmare in chess. UGH

"I don't work based upon what is right or wrong, only on what I have been made to do. My morality is in shades of grey."

What an excellent scene and quote to draw. lOVE IT.

Enjoy

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It had taken a few explanations, but eventually, Erratum's followers accepted (some begrudgingly) Dream's decision in the end. Erratum had assured them all that Dream had not turned his back on them or betrayed them, and in the end, no one was really all that surprised. Dream would most likely die a martyr if this conflict didn't resolve itself quickly. This was why Erratum had been planning how they would approach the creator without him immediately trying to kill them.

"hOI!"

Erratum exhaled slowly as they opened their eyes to stare down at the small creature. "**You are looking well.**" They noted as the Temmie rested either front paw on their leg. Their fur was clean and kempt and they had returned to their rotund and stretchy form. Erratum patted their head and allowed them to settle in their lap, resting peacefully and watching as Temmie ran past the both of them.

Wait.

Erratum turned their head quickly to see the creature bounding off, looking back down at the Temmie still settled down in their lap. Small error windows popped up around them a moment as they tried to understand what they had just seen, but then they spotted someone slinking by their altar. They narrowed their eyes a bit at the suspicious behaviour of their most volatile visitor. They crossed their arms and frowned as the other tried to slip past them.

"**Fresh...**"

Said monster froze in place, turning their head and displaying their shades, spelling out a telling 'UH OH' on them. "Heya, fam! What's hangin'?" The colourful parasite greeted, attempting to hold his jacket closed with both hands. Erratum scanned him up and down with an unimpressed look, beckoning him closer with a curl of their finger. "**Come here.**"

"Ahh, ya sure? I mean-"

"***Fresh,***"

Fresh quickly stepped up to the god as they rose to their feet and appraised Fresh's nervous form. They could hear faint noises now that he was closer, causing them to furrow their brow bone and zero in on

the jacket he was holding closed. "**What do you have there?**" They questioned, watching as Fresh began to sweat a bit. "Nothin'! Just passin' through, nothin' to see here!" He insisted, as though Erratum would *actually* buy that. "**Mhmm.**" The hum sounded doubtful as they gave him an impatient sigh. "**Open your jacket.**"

"Actually I'm wicked chilly right now, so-"

"**That wasn't a suggestion, Fresh.**"

"Yeah I get that but can we reschedule dis? I gots place t' be."

Erratum scowled a bit as they reached forward themselves and grasped the lapels of the brightly coloured jacket. Before Fresh could even process it, the other had already forced the other's hands away and the jacket open.

Small, numerous little monsters tumbled out from the clothing. Each of them gave little sounds and squeaks, various 'hoi's and 'awawa's echoing through the area. Erratum was completely speechless as they stared at the Temmies now swarming at their ankles with fascinated noises.

"Don't get mad-"

"**Where did they all come from?!**" Erratum sputtered as Fresh gave a sheepish grin. "Well, dat's the thing! Once the lil' guy was all healed up, they started... multiplyin'? It was mad weird to see 'em split apart like little amoebas, but ay, love dat for em! Now they got a dope lil family!" Fresh was grinning widely as he pulled his cap off, a smaller Tem sitting on his skull contently. Erratum ran a hand down their face with an exasperated expression. They couldn't believe they hadn't seen them multiplying! Then again, it looked as though Fresh had been

hiding it for quite a while considering the sheer number of them.

"What am I to do with all of these creatures?!"

"Brah, you're da one with all the powers here. You can make 'em a little place to stay, right? Like what they used t' have? C'mon, ya can't just boot 'em back into Horrortale!" Fresh insisted, trying to keep a pleading face on and not let out a snort as the small cat-like monsters climbed their way up on the annoyed Guardian, who didn't seem in a hurry to do anything about it. Erratum pondered upon how their life had come to this; every single decision they had made led them to this very moment.

"**Let me make sure I am understanding this correctly,**" Erratum started, their patience being tested to the *absolute limit* as Fresh stood there, grinning and holding onto a Temmie. "**You want me to create a little village for these creatures to live. The very first homes I actually make... are for these?**" They lifted one arm as a few clung to the threads of their robes.

"Erm... yeah?" Fresh grinned weakly with his shoulders hunched a bit. Erratum gave a heavy sigh and let their arm flop back down uselessly.

"**Yeah, sure, why not...**" This was their life.

And so, Erratum stood before Verse and worked tirelessly on the screen it displayed to them. Fresh hovered nearby, appraising their work while the Tem on his scalp leaned over as well.

"Nah fam, dey like cardboard!"

"***Cardboard?*** **That's not a stable material for-"**

"YAYA! CawrDBOd!"

"Right... of course."

It was a strange creation of makeshift lean-tos and cardboard boxes, but the little creatures appeared delighted when they were introduced to it. In the end, Erratum had to admit it brought them the same warmth to their soul as helping another universe did.

It was a strange way to spend their day, but they decided it wasn't the worst way to do it.

"You have to *swear* to me that if things go sour, you'll call for us." Cross was staring Erratum down with fierce intensity as the other prepared to breach back into the Doodlesphere. Erratum had insisted the best way to approach the creator without starting an immediate conflict would be if they went alone. Cross had not liked this idea but had begrudgingly accepted that they made a valid point. Now, Erratum simply had to bear through his long lecture before they would be able to set off.

"Yes, I've kept a backdoor open into that world that will allow you to enter if it is so needed." Erratum reassured the tense guard, who only sharpened their glare. **"I will call for you if things escalate to out-of-control levels."** They assured him, which only did so much to relieve his anxieties. "Okay... because I'll be *furious* if you don't." He

reminded them with a flash of gold pulsating briefly in their markings. Errata gave an amused smile, much to Cross's irritation, and rested a hand on his head. "**Plus, I need you to stay behind. Reaper agreed to help with T.K, but so did Fresh. I would appreciate you ensuring neither of them pushes him too far. Even if they are Time's champion, they are still a child.**" Cross softened his expression a bit and sagged his shoulders with a sigh. "Yeah... I get what it's like to have such high expectations on your shoulders from a young age..." He agreed.

"**Just as you trained Blue to find his strengths, I know you can help T.K to hone his powers without becoming... well,**" Erratum gave a soft laugh as they gestured to themselves. "**In over their heads.**" They watched as Cross rolled their eyelights at this. "Yeah, no need to tell me twice. Get 'em while they're young *before* they become workaholics trying to fix the entire multiverse's problems."

"**This feels like a personal attack.**"

"You'd be correct."

Erratum gave him a soft smile before a rift opened up behind them. "**All right, I really must be going now. I will call for you if things go poorly, all right?**" They insisted, to which Cross gave them a doubtful look but nodded regardless. Erratum knew there would be no convincing him entirely but was thankful he was willing to trust them regardless. Erratum stepped through into the vast floating island-like area before the rift closed behind them.

All they needed to do now was wait. The creator would come for them.

They settled themselves on the ground, folding their legs and waiting for the creator to appear. They weren't entirely certain what they were

going to say, but they had a basic outline of what they wanted to convey to him. They hoped that was enough to springboard off of, and of course, that the other would be willing to listen to them. They perked up a bit as Ink suddenly landed on the ground a few feet away from them, looking less than pleased to see the god.

"*You.*"

Ink's eyelights were a bright red, locked onto the passive Guardian sitting on the floor of the Doodlesphere. Erratum was watching them, appearing relaxed in stature though they were completely on guard with the artist present. "Are you that eager to die or something?" He growled as his brush bounced anxiously in his hands. Erratum shook their head a bit, not moving off the floor despite the other's hostility.

"No, this isn't about fighting. In fact, the best way to start this off is by apologizing."

Ink narrowed their eyes a bit, shapes shifting within them as he tried to understand what the other meant. **"This whole multiverse 'war', the divide between universes, the way others have begun to scorn you,"** They could see the flash of some unidentified emotion pass briefly over his face as they said this. **"It all has a common factor, and that is myself. I didn't know you or your story well enough to draw a proper conclusion, and yet I did anyway. For that, I am genuinely sorry, Ink."** Erratum appraised the artist the entire time, trying to gauge how the other would take this.

"You think that means anything to me?" Ink snarled, though the rapidly shifting shapes in his eyes spoke volumes to Erratum about how the other *actually* felt about it. Erratum briefly wondered if anyone had ever owned up to a mistake to the creator before. Perhaps they all placed their flaws and faults on him for creating them in the first place. Erratum quickly brought themselves back to reality as Ink continued to glower at them. "You attacked me, you destroyed my worlds, you turned my friends against me, and a sorry is what you

have to offer me??"

"**Not necessarily, no. I want to make things right and explain to everyone what's truly going on here.**" Erratum insisted, getting to their feet now as Ink continued to show rising levels of hostility. The artist tensed as they did, but the god made no move to attack him. "**They need to know why I'm here, why Dream and Nightmare are essential to the multiverse, why you make your worlds, which is something we can accomplish togeth-**"

"What do you mean, 'why I make my worlds'?" Ink cut them off with a sneer. "You might win everyone else over by acting all-knowing, but that facade doesn't work on me. You know nothing about me!" Erratum gave him a sad expression, which only made Ink want to crack their skull all over again.

"**Ink...**" Erratum sighed heavily at the resistance the other was putting up. "**I've been around nearly as long as you have. I've heard your stories from the Guardians themselves, I've seen your past, your actions, and your life through memories and through direct observations. I know more about you than you can remember about yourself.**" Erratum watched the other back up slightly, putting more distance between them. "**I saw your creation by Fate; I live in the same place you were created!**"

Ink seemed to freeze at this, looking uncomfortable at the mention of the antivoid. "The... the white place?" The slight tremble in his voice was audible, and Erratum had the natural urge to comfort him immediately. They resisted, however, and simply nodded their head. "**Yes, though it is much different now that I'm there. I can manipulate that plane with almost no limitations, and endless white was simply not what I saw as homely. So, I changed it to be more inhabitable.**" Erratum explained to him. "**I'm... sorry you were left there for so long. Alone and confused... I'm certain it was a horrible experience.**"

"Don't pretend to care. You would just as soon find joy in my death." Ink snapped at the audacity the other had to say this. "**Not at all!**" Erratum instantly denied with a wide-eyed stare. "**Just like myself, you were never asked to be made. You were never asked if *this*,**" They gestured around to the floating land they were on, looking up at the hanging paper that decorated the world. "**Was the life you wanted. We were created with a purpose from a higher being and we're doing the best with what we have.**" They watched as Ink wavered a bit, face contorting between agony and outrage. "**I thought you made worlds on a whim, just because. I thought you made cruel worlds as an experiment... but I was wrong. I was so *very* wrong.**" The grim expression made Ink feel a wave of anxiety in the cavity of their chest, as though the other knew some terrible secret about him.

"**Why didn't you tell any of them?**"

Ink furrowed his brow bone a moment, attempting to understand what they were talking about. "Tell who what? What are you talking about?" He demanded of them, brush held in front of him threateningly. "Stop being cryptic and vague and just tell me up front!"

"**About the voices. The muses that speak to you.**"

Ink felt that rolling wave of anxiety spike to new levels. "How..." He breathed as Erratum continued to watch him tremble and panic. "You can't know that... you can't *possibly* know about that!" He denied frantically as he backed even further away from the god. "**There are many things I have the unfortunate knowledge of. In the end, it doesn't matter. I want to help you, not hurt you, Ink. I know it may not seem that way after everything that's happened, but I *sincerely* mean that!**" They tried to reason with him, but they could see the other was hesitant to believe them in his defensive state. "I don't want your help!" Ink spit the words out hatefully, shaking off the anxiety with a quick taste from his red vial. "You're just trying to manipulate me!"

Erratum made a frustrated noise as they rested a hand on their forehead. "**I just need you to give me a chance to *prove it* to you!**" They continued their attempts to appeal to him, but Ink didn't seem willing to hear them out any longer. "You lost any chance to ask *anything* of me!" Ink swiped his brush forward, a slew of paint heading Erratum's way. The god jolted as Verse appeared before them, expanding their window and absorbing the messy attack. Erratum quickly hit the download button, watching a cloud of binary hover in the air beside them.

A blob of paint appeared from the code, falling to the ground with a crude 'SPLAT' while Erratum stared at it. Ink stared as well, befuddled and confused by the 'attack' the other made.

"**I'm... not certain what I expected.**" Erratum admitted as they glanced away from the stain on the ground. They couldn't wield ink and paint the way the creator did, after all. Ink shook their head, snapping themselves out of their trance, and glared at the other. "You can't prove squat to me, so you might as well leave before I put another crack in your skull!" He threatened, but Erratum blinked at the words.

Maybe they *could* prove it.

Erratum held their hands up as the other took a threatening step forward. "**What if I could?**" They questioned, watching Ink give them a peculiar look and slightly lower their brush. "What are you talking-"

That was all the distraction they needed to shoot their strings forward. Ink gave a choked gasp as they pierced through the frontal bone of their skull, leaving no damage in their path into his mind. Once again, Erratum found themselves experiencing these memories in a first-person view from the creator's perspective.

They could see the shapeless form of Fate, cupping them in their hands as magic burned and throbbed within their chest to the point it was nearly unbearable. A sickening popping sensation resonated within their chest as shattered pieces escaped through their ribs. The pieces scattered like shrapnel, leaving a cold, empty and numb feeling within their body.

This wasn't enough, Erratum knew they needed more than this.

They could hear the soft words of Fate whispering to them, seeming to coil around their entire body.

"-My wonderful creation, and you shall show-"

Everything was fading in and out, and Erratum quickly recalled their theory that Ink may not have been fully conscious, or even entirely sentient yet, when this was being explained to him.

"-Too much, and the multiverse will-"

"-Will make due to give you the emotions the others-"

"-Create, my wonderful-"

Erratum broke away from their hold on his mind, trembling as they fell onto their knees. Their ears were ringing, marrow dripping from the acoustic meatus as they gasped for air. Marrow ran from their nose, and they could even taste it in their mouth. Their body was pushed to the limit trying to pull forward these memories to

experience them, and they could feel how much energy it sapped from them. Their head felt like it could cave in and crumble away under all the pressure within their skull.

Ink was hunched over, black ink on the ground below him where he had presumably vomited from the experience. He looked up slowly to Erratum, face unreadable as the god tried to keep themselves from simply collapsing forward altogether. "I don't..." Ink trailed off, his voice raw from the screams he had let out. Erratum nodded weakly at his words, fatigue visible in their eyes. "**I can see... why you may not have understood what they explained to you.**" They huffed out weakly. "**You were hardly aware...**"

"I don't understand..." Ink whispered as he clutched onto his brush, holding it tight to his body like a security item. "**Ink... you're Fate's champion... you're meant to help this multiverse. You can't do it without guidance... without knowing what to do. Let me help you...**" They touched Verse's screen, pulling forth a small shard from it. Ink stared wide-eyed, recognizing the fragment from the flashes of memories he had seen. "**I know I can do it... I can help... I can save you.**" Ink watched as the small shard retreated back into the task menu, hands trembling as he dropped the brush in his hands. "I..." He clenched his eyes closed and gritted his teeth.

"*NO!*"

Erratum jolted a bit at the sudden outburst. "**No...?**" They grunted as they pushed themselves up with great effort. "**Ink, please, I-**"

"I don't TRUST YOU!" Ink shouted as he groped around his sash a moment in a panic. "You're... you're trying to trick me! How do I know those are even my memories? How do I know you aren't fucking with me?! You're trying to appeal to my emotions, my vulnerable side." He clenched his teeth as he withdrew a white vial from the edge of his sash, eyes peering at them with a wild expression.

"But I won't let you."

Erratum watched the other down the white vial with a frantic swallow, feeling a rising sense of dread in their stomach. Ink leaned forward and vomited a sludge brown slew of paint onto the ground, body stiff as he panted and braced his hands on his knees. He stayed that way for a while, the oppressive atmosphere weighing Erratum down further. Ink finally moved after another tense moment of silence, turning their head upward to stare at Erratum.

Their eyes were reduced to small, white pinpoints. Something about them brought genuine fear to Erratum's soul.

"**Ink?**" Erratum cautiously called out to him, watching the creator pick up their brush and appraise it with a blank expression. They glanced up to Erratum again after another moment, those same dead eyes staring straight through them. Then, suddenly, he launched himself at the Guardian.

Erratum gasped as their wall shot up for protection, but the fierce slam of Ink's brush combined with Erratum's already exhausted magic reduced it to nothing but pixels. Erratum stared with wide eyes as the artist swung the brush around with practiced ease, slamming it into the side of their ribs and sending them careening to the side. Erratum gave a shout of pain as they slid across the Doodlesphere's floor, winded and stunned from the sudden attack. They quickly noticed the warning window before them, barely rolling away in time to avoid the handle of the brush slamming down where their head would have been.

"**Ink, stop!**" Erratum shouted, wincing as they pulled themselves to their feet. "**I don't want to fight you! Just-**" They had to dodge a few more slews of paint, the other giving them no time in between attacks to even consider retaliating in any way. The artist moved one hand to

the side, summoning a blob of floating black ink just above his hand. He flourished his hand, the ink snaking around and shifting to his will. It lashed out like a whip, which Erratum barely had time to avoid. The ink wound around their wrist, however, as it obeyed the command of its wielder. Erratum retaliated by shooting forth their own strings, which caused Ink's focus to switch to them and the ink holding Erratum to dissipate. The artist lashed out with their brush, a wave of red paint coating and dissolving the strings as they made contact. Erratum stared on with shock as they did, never having seen anything able to destroy the threads they had made.

Ink seemed to appraise the puddle of red paint on the ground, growing still again as he did so. Erratum took that moment to slowly begin to approach again, step-by-step, trying not to make it obvious. "**Ink... please, we don't have to do this. We don't have to fight.**"

"You lie to Ink." Erratum stopped as the artist spoke, never taking his eyes off the red paint. "You hurt Ink. We won't trust you." The god noted the odd speech pattern the other adopted, assuming it was the result of whatever he had taken before he attacked. "**I admit that I was wrong, that I've handled things poorly. Trust is something I want to earn from you, and I can only hope that I can prove to you that I truly want to help.**" That seemed to trigger a reaction from the artist, who moved their hand up again. Suddenly, the red paint jumped to life, flying toward Erratum in a surprise attack.

"We don't want *your help."*

Erratum gave a pained wail as the red paint collided with their face, slathering both orbits down to the sphenoid bones. They grasped at their sockets, only able to feel the burning pain as they desperately dug at the paint that blinded them. Their fingertips burned as they became coated with the paint covering their eyes, only bringing forth more searing pain. It was agonizing, and they felt for a moment that they truly might die at the hands of the creator.

But then, they could hear the sound of crackling magic and sense new souls entering the Doodlesphere. There was a brief sound of scuffling and screams, but they couldn't separate whose voice belonged to who, and they certainly couldn't see them. After a few agonizing minutes, they felt a set of arms attempting to hoist them up. They resisted immediately, uncertain who was attempting to manhandle them.

"Errata, relax! Shit, just hold still. Verse, open a portal back!" Erratum was relieved to hear Cross's voice. "**I can't see!**" They didn't mean for it to come out as frantic as it did, but they were terrified and completely defenseless. Cross hushed them, trying to keep them calm and their head still. "Blue, come on! Just leave him here, he doesn't take priority over Errata!" So Blue was here too? Of course, their call would reach out to both of them. They could feel it when they passed back through to their plane, landing on their back with their head in someone's lap. "Geno! Get some water, as much as you can carry in a bowl!" They heard Cross command. They listened to the sound of feet crushing grass around them, hurrying around in a frantic manner.

"Hold still,"

Erratum arched and jerked as water poured into their sockets, washing out the paint left behind from the attack. Cross sat them up after a minute, helping them drain the water from their sockets. The god gave a few hard blinks, staring at the fuzzy image of Cross in front of them. "Errata!" Cross breathed out in relief as he saw their eyelights again. "Are you okay? Can you see?"

"**A little?**" Erratum replied, reaching their hand out to feel how far the other was from them. "Shit... um, maybe it's temporary. You'll heal, right? You'll be fine." He sounded like he was trying to convince himself. "Brah," Fresh frowned as a metal bat appeared in their hand, moving to rest it on his shoulder. "It's on sight, my dude. *On sight."* Erratum shook their head quickly at this, not wanting to escalate this further. "**No, we can't do that. He doesn't understand, and it was clear he wasn't in the right mindset. I'm not sure what was in that vial but-**"

"Wait," Blue cut them off with a concerned frown. "What colour was it?"

"White?"

Blue huffed out a frustrated breath. "That's what I thought. Whenever he did that back when we were fighting as the Stars, he would just lose all control. He'd vomit this gross brown crap and then just attack, no mercy and no restraints." He recalled with a frown. "It was always kind of scary to watch." Erratum swiped uselessly at the air toward Blue, frustrated they couldn't properly see him to comfort him. **"I believe it's a mixture of all the other paints he has consumed. It sets him to a blank state with no emotions, and apparently with no ability to hold back."** They felt Blue press against their side in a hold, smiling softly as their champion squeezed onto them.

"Well," Cross sighed as he leaned against Erratum. "At least you called for us... a little late, but I guess it's something." He grumbled. **"It wasn't going bad until the very end. I did what I promised to do, didn't I?"** They felt the skeleton give another hard sigh. "Yeah... you're not gonna hear the end of this though. I'm gonna have to go back to following you everywhere you go again."

Great.

Now that the adrenaline had faded, a dull painful throb settled within their sockets. Fear gripped their soul as they silently wondered if their eyes would ever get any better than what they were now. What use would they be if they couldn't see? How could they navigate and assist others if they couldn't even see three inches in front of their face? They would be useless, *worthless* as a Guardian. They had too many people relying on them; they couldn't become the one relying on others.

As if sensing their rising distress, Blue and Cross pressed closer to them in a futile attempt to provide comfort. The rest of the group remained quiet as Erratum's breath gave terrified hitches every so often, trying to accept the sudden debilitating injury.

Chapter End Notes

WHOOPS.

My hand slipped.

Chapter 25: Misunderstood

Chapter Summary

Erratum pays another visit to Nightmare's manor after some divine intervention for their debilitating injury. A few stories are shared between deities.

Chapter Notes

I'M SORRY. PLEASE PUT DOWN YOUR WEAPONS AND SPARE THE AUTHOR. EVERYONE WAS AFTER MY BLOOD.

Listen, would it really be Error if their eyes worked perfectly? I'm JUST saying! Speaking of which...

https://www.deviantart.com/vcl2006/art/Void-of-Emotion-919318659

You know em, you love em, Mx VCL drawing the incredible scene before the infamous blinding. It's... the most amazing thing I've ever seen. Be sure to check their other works too, btw's! They're all magnificent and I'm a huge fan. You should definitely follow them and like everything they have. Author Dev has proclaimed it.

Enjoy

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Maybe I can help!"

T.K sat up on his knees in front of Erratum, a look of determination in his eyes that the god couldn't see. Blue had wrapped several bandages around their skull to keep their eyes protected while they healed what they could. The god had been more subdued and quiet over the days, as though the loss of sight threw them into a more vulnerable demeanor. Erratum turned their head in the direction of the child's voice, their smile gentle and sad.

"**My little Stopwatch,**" Errata sighed, reaching their hand out until T.K scooted closer and pressed his head up against the outstretched hand. "**You're sweet, but you have a lot more training to do before you can reverse Time that significantly.**" They could tell the other was pouting without even seeing them. "But! I can cause a seed to sprout into a full flower and revert it back to a seed instantly! I can totally reverse Time on your eyes to reverse the damage! I'm getting really good at controlling it!" T.K protested insistently at their statement. "**And you're doing wonderfully. You've come to use your magic much quicker than I did when I was first starting out, but that is the fact of the matter; you are just starting. Your heart is larger than your magical reserves.**" Erratum pet along his skull as they felt him slump in defeat. "What's the point in being a champion if I can't do anything? I'm just a dumb kid in over their head." T.K mumbled, clearly disheartened.

"**Hey now,**" Errata sat up a bit straighter in response, a frown firm on their face. "**I won't hear such words, you understand? It is frustrating to have such unfathomable power with no skill to wield it, I understand that well, but that does not mean you are dumb. As for being a child, there is nothing wrong with that either. You have a lot of responsibility on you at such a young age, but don't let your size determine your worth.**" They instructed him firmly. T.K gave a small snicker as he listened to the other rant. "We should put you in a box and have people pay gold through a coin slot for your wisdom like those old fortune teller machines." He quipped, earning a soft laugh from Erratum.

T.K perked up at the sound of a new portal opening into the world, standing up immediately and aiming their slingshot at the positive spirit that appeared. Dream blinked at the hostile posture, glancing around to make sure the other was truly threatening *him*.

"What do *you* want, traitor?" T.K demanded of the confused spirit. Errata placed a hand on his shoulder, shaking their head a bit. "Stand down, little soldier, we've been over this." Errata lightly chastised, earning a soft "Hmph!" from the small champion, who elected to

stomp their way past the positive spirit. Dream blinked as he stared at Erratum, quickly rushing to the other to get a closer look. He gasped as he took in their weary posture and bandages, placing a hand over his mouth.

"Errata! What happened??" Dream frantically questioned, dropping to his knees in front of them and moving his hands to the bandages. "**Well...**" The god trailed off, making Dream frown and turn his head away. "Ink... right." He muttered softly, feeling conflicted by this information. "**It was my fault, really. I pushed him too hard for our first 'negotiation' meeting. He downed his white vial and, well, the rest kind of followed suit.**" The god explained, causing Dream to look back to the god quickly. "He took his white paint?! No wonder you're in bad shape... what did he do?" Dream questioned as he removed the bandages. Errata gave a hard blink, seeing the golden outline of the spirit in front of them. "**I took a direct hit from his red paint and it blinded me.**"

"Oh, stars..." Dream breathed as he traced around the orbits, causing the Guardian to wince. "Sorry! Sorry, let me..." He fed a bit of healing magic into the other, unsure what he could do for them. Errata gave a relieved sigh as some of the throbbings dulled and disappeared. Their eyelights didn't improve much, though they could kind of make out his features if he leaned in close enough. "**Thank you.**" They hummed as they pulled their hand up to test their close-range sight. "You should have called for someone sooner! How long have you been sitting here in pain?!" Dream griped at them with a firm frown on his face. "**I didn't want to bother anyone with the matter. Plus, it's my own fault it happened.**" They could barely see the frustrated expression as Dream groaned and rubbed at his temple bones. "That's not an excuse! Stop being a martyr, this instant!" He demanded of them, which only earned a laugh. "I'm serious!"

Errata elected to further ignore this conversation, feeling the other's positivity plummeting. "Speaking of Ink, how has he been since you rejoined him?" They questioned, watching as Dream's face shifted into something a bit lighter. "Oh! Well, it's been fine. He's still a bit airheaded, but he actually apologized to me! I know he's not all bad, just severely misguided." He replied. "**Lack of guidance is more the**

words for it. I delved through the memories of his creation and everything was extremely fuzzy. He didn't hear the extent of Fate's words, only pieces. Things such as 'create' and how to use his vials. No wonder he was trapped in the anti-void for so long; he had no idea how to get out." The god gave a pained expression at this "**I can't imagine what that does to a person. Alone and confused as your very first memories.**" Dream furrowed his brow bone as sympathy shot through his soul. "Yeah... I guess he needs someone more than I realized. Well, I'm not gonna leave him! He's a mess on his own." Errata watched on with what little vision they had, but they didn't even need eyes to see the affection the other held for the artist.

"It's amazing he's still alive after all these years."

Errata turned their head slightly as they heard the voice of Reaper nearby. They could see the lax demigod, for the most part, hovering closer to their altar. Erratum squinted their sockets further to attempt to make out the streak of red around the other's shoulders. "Oh! I didn't realize you two were already that far into courting!" Dream beamed as he gave Reaper a polite wave. "**What do you mean? I can't see.**" Erratum reminded with the faintest of pouts, though they'd never admit to making such a face. "It's a little, um," The spirit flushed slightly with a flustered laugh. "Well, the courter wears an article of clothing that is personal to the one they're courting. It's supposed to be, um, enticing? It's supposed to suggest equal ownership of one another, not just the courter to the one being courted. It's supposed to be tempting and intimate." The spirit looked embarrassed from explaining it, as though he had said something scandalous. Reaper gave a few amused snickers as he adjusted Geno's scarf around his neck. "The look on his face was priceless." He agreed before turning their attention back to Erratum. "Anyway, I came here to deliver something to you."

Deliver?

Erratum gave him a curious look at the statement, watching as the demigod pulled something from his robe. "Found it on my rounds

through the Guardians' temples. It was in a really nice box at Karma's offering plate. It was addressed to ya, so don't go thinking I robbed your Guardian." He assured as he passed the object over to Erratum. The god held it closer to their face to get a better view of it. They blinked as they recognized them as a pair of spectacles, tracing the rim of the object with one finger. The god hummed with interest, using a set of strings to ensure they were secured snuggly to their skull.

"Oh wow,"

The world lit back up into view for them, causing a grin to brighten their features once more. It wasn't the same as having their eyes healed, and perhaps they felt a little silly having to wear them, but it was certainly worth it to see again. "How is it? How's your sight?" Dream questioned eagerly, leaning forward with anticipation. Erratum huffed out a soft laugh, closing their eyes a moment as they adjusted to them slowly.

"**Just fine.**"

It was loud in the manor, that much Killer knew. It had been loud since the night before if he wanted to be specific.

It had been around two weeks since the incident with their soul in Storyshift. They had a couple of bad days, ones he knew concerned all of the residents in the manor, but he had pulled through just fine. It had been worth it to see the visible relief on Nightmare's face when he was taken off of bed rest.

Still, that brought him to his current predicament. He recalled Nightmare's warning about having his weakest spot out on display for everyone, and he felt shame as he watched his soul hover at his chest. He hated the implied disappointment his king had for his obvious weakness, or at the very least, that's what he assumed the other felt. He was Nightmare's right hand, the one he relied on to get shit done. He *had* to be the firm tank between the world and his king, he *had* to. His soul was stopping him, as usual.

So, desperate measures were being considered

And now he stood in the gardens of the manor, observing the pristinely kept roses that Horror tended to. He distantly reflected on how different Horror had become in such a short amount of time with seemingly no cause. He certainly wasn't gonna complain; he had seemed healthier and even, dare he say, happier. He figured whatever was helping him couldn't be too bad, so he elected to let the other be and not pester him.

He tensed at the sound of rustling leave and footsteps, turning themselves around to face the incoming person. He lowered his knife ever so slightly as he recognized the person approaching him, watching as they struggled to brush away stray leaves and avoid getting caught on a lone branch.

"Not the most convenient place I've been called..."

"You think I was gonna let your magical signature get all over my room?" Killer scoffed as Erratum straightened their robes with a sigh. Killer rose a brow bone and snickered a bit. "What's with the glasses? Did I catch ya in the middle of your knitting circle, grandma?" He taunted the god, who only looked on with confusion. "**No, I haven't had the time to knit today, actually.**" Killer felt little satisfaction with this answer, hoping to elicit an annoyed response from the other. "Yeah... whatever." Killer shook his head as he looked the other up and down. Errata stared back, giving him an appraising look.

"Well?"

"I'm gettin' there!" Killer snapped back, flipping his knife anxiously as he tried to swallow his pride. "Fuck, I really don't want to ask you for help. It's a big blow to my pride, ya know?" He watched as Errata nodded, having a dull feeling of appreciation for the other not rubbing it in his face. "Not sure if Crossy boy told you about what happened in Storyshift," He prompted.

"Yes, about the splitting they did and Chara threatening your soul?" They checked, to which Killer nodded. "Yeah... so," He grumbled a bit as he stilled his movements, keeping the newer knife clasped in his hand. "I hate knowing someone can get one over on me so easily. One wrong hit and I'm clocking out of this life, and it sucks. I know I could be so much better if it was in my chest where it *belongs."* Killer growled as he glared at the hovering target as though it personally offended him.

"You wish me to place your soul back where it should be." Erratum theorized as the other struggled to admit what they wanted. Killer nodded once, refusing to meet their eyes as he did so. Erratum frowned as they puzzled over this situation. They weren't exactly sure how to go about doing this as the other's soul was quite... unique, to say the least. Perhaps, however, if they could revert it closer to what it should be, it would respond easier. It was worth a shot at least.

"Let me try something." That was all the permission they asked before golden strings were wrapping around Killer's soul. Killer gave a sound as though someone punched all the air out of him, immediately feeling that sensation in their chest they had felt the first time this happened. "W-wait, what are you doing?" They stammered as the god considered their soul a moment. **"Well, my theory is it is unable to reside within you in this state. So, the more it resembles your original soul, the easier it is to influence."** Erratum explained, charging up the light magic bestowed upon them by Faith and Hope.

"What?! That wasn't part of the conditions!" Killer snapped with panic. "You can't make me go back to that! I'm supposed to be impassive, unflappable! I don't *want* to be like the *original.*" He hissed at them. Erratum glanced up at him a moment, tilting their head slightly.

"Forgive me, but I don't believe I asked."

Killer shouted as the strings lit up an even brighter gold, causing him to fall to his knees. Erratum watched closely as their positive memories fueled the magic, coaxing the soul to bend to their will. Any influence Chara had in the making of Killer's soul was no match for the sheer power and magic Erratum washed over it. Killer wailed as their soul warbled and warped, inverting in on itself until it pulsated as a bright heart. Erratum seemed satisfied as they guided it back into the monster's chest cavity, watching them convulse as it slotted back in place. Erratum looked pleased as the strings retracted back to them. **"There we are, right back where it should be."** They spoke with little fanfare, Killer gasping and grasping the front of his shirt.

"You bastard... *bastard...* this isn't what I wanted..." Killer panted, feeling a swell of emotions attempting to crest over him. **"Maybe not, but it's what you needed."** Erratum replied, tucking their hands together in the long sleeves of their robes. **"You've let others control you and your feelings your entire life. You don't know how to feel and act for yourself, only valuing your worth based on what you can do for Nightmare; for those that you try to protect."** They spoke as Killer struggled back to his feet. **"You can't care for anyone, however, if you can't care for yourself first. The only way you can do that is to relearn who you are."**

"None of that makes sense. You're just spouting bullshit." Killer growled as he clenched his eyes closed tighter. "Fuck... these feelings... it's been so long..." He whispered with audible pain in their voice. "I've done too much... I've gone too far. I let them convince me to kill everyone I loved and I..." He gripped his skull, shouting out his frustration. "No! Fuck, stop! I'm not going back to that! I won't feel guilt or regret! I'm not doing it!" He tried to deny his own swelling feelings desperately. Erratum could only watch him struggle, unable

to soothe their mind or offer any support. Anything they'd have to give wouldn't be well received. Killer glowered at them, hate clear in the small pinpricks of light Erratum could identify. "I don't get it... you help me, but you still try to fuck me over. Whose side are you even on? I can't understand why you'd fight us so hard when you hate Ink so much." He grunted. "**I do not hate Ink, he suffers like the rest of you do.**" Erratum explained with a small frown. "**That's something I've learned myself recently...**"

"Heh! The way you two fought? I doubt it. What could *possibly* make you go from wanting him virtually dead to sympathizing with him?" Killer sneered, earning a small sigh from Erratum. They moved to settle on the stone bench nearby, closing their eyes and considering this. "**Once again, that's not what my goal was. It was to stop his creative spree and prevent them from creating horrible worlds. Things have come to light recently that have made me... consider my methods.**" They stated. Killer frowned as he dared to approach a bit closer. "All right, I'll bite. What things?" He ventured. Erratum opened their eyes again as they peered up at the full moon.

"Can I tell you a story?"

"Erm, a story?" Dream blinked as Ink sat on the floor of their base. Ink nodded his head as he set his sketchpad aside, looking a bit uneasy. "Yeah, about... about some personal stuff." He explained quietly, earning the spirit's full attention. "Of course! You can tell me anything Ink. I won't judge you." He assured him with a comforting smile, which earned an uneasy smile back. "Okay..." Ink muttered as he hugged his knees to his chest, resting his chin on them.

"When I first left the anti-void and realized I could create worlds, I

was so happy. I could make people, so I wasn't alone! I could create brand new worlds and watch them go! I wouldn't feel so alone if there were a bunch of other people in the multiverse, right?" Ink's smile was sad as he gave a long sigh. "I knew I was different from all of them. Watching them fight with the human, seeing their souls, I knew I would never fit in. I was made outside of everything, without any sort of world of my own. I tried, *really hard,* to feel something on my own, but it never worked. I didn't have the capacity to actually feel things and I felt... well, like a Flowey." Ink laughed a bit at the comparison. "I tried to be good though, and I think I have been! I... I don't think everyone else sees that though. They see all the things I've done wrong and not all the things I've done right." He shook his head a bit, returning to his original point.

"Dreamtale..."

Dream tensed a bit at the mention of it.

"I... I wanted to make someone who could understand. People who knew what it was like to have so much responsibility on them, so I could relate to them. I could have actual friends who would understand! Someone who didn't really have an actual soul, being spirits and everything." He was grinning again, and Dream was hanging onto every word. "I didn't interfere with worlds or interrupt the story, but I really wanted to. I hated thinking I had to wait so long to meet the both of you!"

Dream was acutely aware of his usage of 'both'.

"So I broke my own rules. It was supposed to be small things, I swear! Leaving little things for you all! Books, little treats, just little things! Then I... I saw how difficult it was for you, Dream. You were doing so much for so many people, and I hated that. I tried so hard to lighten the load, and change the story a bit so you were treated better. I didn't think of what that could do... of tipping the scales where you were treated well, but Nightmare was treated unfairly. He was always quiet

and kept to himself. I just thought that's how he was, that's what made him happy. I knew the others didn't treat him right, and I tried to help! I tried messing with the villagers and changing the story but... it went wrong." He whispered as he closed his eyes. "When Nightmare consumed the apples, I didn't think... I didn't think that would happen. I wasn't sure *what* would happen, but... he needed to be stronger after the accident. They were all encircling him and I knew they'd kill him... but I didn't know once he ate one, he wouldn't be able to stop. I didn't know it would corrupt him and destroy the person I had seen as a friend from afar. I..." Ink paused as Dream scooted forward, moving to wipe away some of the artist's tears from his face.

"I didn't know..."

"I know Ink..." Dream soothed quietly, his own tears streaking down his face. This was *nothing* like what Erratum had told him in his dreamscape, not at all. Dream didn't think Ink was lying to him either about any of this, plus, Ink was a terrible liar. Erratum had gotten their knowledge of Dreamtale from the other Guardians, however. What had happened? How did the story get so skewed by the time it reached Erratum?

"I didn't leave you alone, you know."

Dream blinked as he sat back on his haunches while Ink moved to cross his legs. "I knew too well what it was like to be stuck, unable to go anywhere, and alone." He sighed as he gave Dream an apologetic expression, eyelights shifting slowly in shapes. "I visited as much as I could, but with Nightmare out there now, I was stuck trying to keep things in order in the world. Plus I... kind of went radio silent for a long time. I... I guess it was a kind of depression? Just, you know, without actually having any feelings. I just kind of sat in the Doodlesphere, void of any emotions and refusing to take my paints. It was easier to be numb than to think about what happened." He hummed as he closed his eyes. "Things... things changed, let's say. I'm not... I'm not ready to talk about it." He whispered in a shaky voice. Dream knew he was referring to the Muses in his mind, but didn't reveal that he was aware of their existence. "But! When you came out

of stone, I was so happy! I finally was able to see you, to talk with you for real! You were... you were just as gentle and kind as I had thought." There was a fondness in his eyes that momentarily stole Dream's breath. "And you stayed. You stayed with me and you even saw me as a friend, as an equal. I... I never had that with anyone else." He shrugged a moment after he was finished.

"So yeah... that's... that's my story."

Killer blew out a slow breath as he took in Errata's tale, rubbing the back of his neck. "Shit..." He muttered as he let that all sink in. "That's... definitely not what I was expecting." He admitted.

"Me either." Erratum agreed with a sad smile. **"That is why I can't bring myself to hate him. He doesn't know, and he needs help, just like the rest of you. No one has noticed it until now, however."** They shook their head a bit as they stood once more. Killer rubbed his knuckles over his sternum, still trying desperately to ease the aching wail his soul gave from all the emotional torment. "You know, this doesn't change nothin'. I still can't stand you and I'm gonna follow Boss's orders whatever they may be, even if it's killing ya." Killer gave them a strange expression as the god nodded their understanding. "Psh, no wonder you get yourself hurt all the time. You're an idiot." Erratum didn't seem phased by the insult. **"I suppose that would be everything you needed?"** They checked one last time. "You did shit I didn't even want. Like hell I'll ask you for something else." Killer growled back in response. "I'd suggest you leave before I repay you for your *kindness*." It was a blatant threat, but Erratum didn't appear intimidated.

Killer was only slightly annoyed (and perhaps impressed) by their calm demeanor.

"Until next time then." Erratum nodded their farewell as a rift opened behind them. "There won't *be* a next time." Killer spat back at them with a glare. The god only gave him a soft laugh before the rift closed up again. Killer huffed as the other left, grumbling under his breath as he headed back toward the castle. "Stupid smug son of a bitch..." He muttered the entire way through the manor. He paused briefly at the screams from a floor above, frowning as it elected a foreign feeling in his soul.

"Horror has him under control."

Killer snapped to attention at Nightmare's voice, turning to face him immediately. The dark spirit appraised him with his working eye, frown tight on his face. Killer could feel the sweat beading at the back of his skull.

"Is it done?"

Killer nodded in response to his question. "Yes, Boss." He answered obediently. Nightmare zeroed in on his chest, seeing the soul absent from its normal resting place. "Good." With that, Nightmare brushed past him without another word. Killer breathed out a sigh of relief once he had left the room, feeling his soul pounding in his chest.

He would never understand why Nightmare had been so insistent for him to call Erratum.

Chapter End Notes

VERRRRY dialogue heavy, I know, but also lots of looks into Ink's real character. I love being able to fledge out Ink's character now that all the fun stuff has been revealed. You knew I had to bring back the courting stuff too; I love it for some reason, even though

it was never supposed to happen.

Erratum is sloooowly making their way through the pack of dark Sanses, aren't they?

Chapter 26: Who's Underneath

Chapter Summary

A set of universes collide, and unfortunately, Nightmare gets there first.

Chapter Notes

So. Here we are.

The chapter I have had in my brain for nearly five months. Also, I started this book six months ago on the 20th?? Gracious me.

Anyhow! THIS chapter, specifically, I have been waiting to write for ages. I am genuinely excited to share this with everyone.

Enjoy

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Horror gave a dissatisfied growl as Erratum came to collect him from his universe. He couldn't tell what was wrong, but he could sense the other's discomfort with their keen senses. Erratum looked a little uncomfortable with how close Horror was, but the monster didn't seem to notice or care. "Glasses." He rumbled curiously as he took them in, tilting his head a bit as Erratum touched the frames at their mentioning.

"**Yes I, ah, have to wear these.**" Erratum explained while Horror gave them a suspicious glower. "Why? Didn't... need 'em before." He questioned the other expectantly. Erratum gave a heavy sigh as the other continued to pester them. "**Okay, okay, but don't get too angry.**" They insisted, which only made Horror narrow his eyes with a low level of rage already. "**I went to speak with Ink and things got out of hand. He blinded me with his paint, but I'm certain it was an accident. He didn't seem to be in his right mind.**" They held their hands up placatingly as Horror bared his teeth in outrage. "**It's fine though, I'm fine! I can see just fine with them on,**

okay?" They insisted, but Horror didn't seem too satisfied with this answer. Erratum sighed as they allowed Horror to squeeze them tightly, willing to deal with the scrutinizing of their body for further hidden injuries. Things would be so much simpler if they could just make people *listen.* Often, it felt as though the multiverse was too precarious to leave in the hands of others. If *we* controlled-

Erratum closed their eyes calmly as the voice swelled away, compartmentalized down where it should be.

"Everything... okay?" Horror frowned as the god refocused their attention on him. **"Of course, just a little loud today."** Erratum excused, which seemed to satisfy the lumbering monster. "Don't...push yourself." Horror gave them a narrowed-eyed look as he said this, earning a quiet laugh. **"I'll do my best, but I can't promise anything."** They swiped their hand and parted reality for him, seeing the distant land of Farmtale in the rift. **"Are you ready t-"**

Erratum had turned their head to look at him when their eyelights suddenly extinguished. Horror looked alarmed as the rift closed and Erratum fell back into the snow underfoot. The universe shook a moment, causing Horror to hunch over and shield the god with his body. He had no idea what was happening, but Erratum was wailing and seizing under him in distress. Horror snapped his head up with a feral snarl as a bright light and a pair of new souls appeared near them. He relaxed his posture as he saw Blue and Cross standing, or attempting to remain standing, with their weapons drawn.

"What's going on?!" Cross demanded as Horror remained positioned over Erratum. "Don't know! Just... started screaming... everything shaking and..." Horror attempted to explain, eyelight wide and body tense. Blue touched Cross's shoulder with wide eyes. "Last time this happened, those universes collided." He informed grimly, causing Cross to tense up significantly. Horror didn't understand what they were talking about, but a direct call to his soul distracted him.

"Nightmare..." Horror informed as the world stilled once more. Blue nodded in understanding as they all helped the dazed god up to a sitting position. "Go, before he comes looking for you." Blue encouraged. "We've got this handled." Horror seemed hesitant, but knew he couldn't stay much longer without risking the negative spirit poking around in his world looking for him. He growled as he darted off toward his home, letting Blue and Cross help Erratum back to their plane. Erratum grunted with pain as they held their head, trying to ease the throbbing sensation so they could properly deal with this new problem.

"Errata, you have to relax," Cross instructed them firmly. "You're not gonna make it stop if you try and force the pain down. Take a breather, okay? Just lie back and *breathe* for once." He sighed as the god gave a pained groan. "The worlds are already a fused mess, it's not like it can get any worse at this point if you wait."

Nightmare grinned viciously as the waves of torment fed into his body. This mess of a universe was absolutely *drowning* in negativity, more so than any world he had ever come across before. The moment he had felt a sudden spike in negativity, he knew he had to find and claim the source. He couldn't believe how lucky he'd gotten to find something that made him feel so *powerful,* so thoroughly filled with negative intent. His subordinates seemed both fascinated and disturbed with the scenery as they passed several amalgamations of monsters in the landscape. None of them tried eliminating them after Killer struck one down, nearly causing him to seize up with the large flux of magic it caused his body. That was fine, however. They didn't need to kill anything to cause suffering in this world. The fact that it even existed was painful enough to fuel Nightmare.

He could only give a sadistic laugh as his brother and the creator appeared right on time in the universe with him. He could see Dream

immediately waver, buffeted and surrounded by nothing but negativity. "Well, well," Nightmare drawled as he approached them, taking delight in how vulnerable they were in this universe. "I suppose you've come to try and stop me, correct? For once, however, it seems *I* have the tactical advantage. Not a drop of positive emotion in this world, Dream, for you to draw upon. I have to applaud you, Ink. Creating such a *delicious* world where happiness comes to die? I feel like it's my birthday." He snickered as Ink's face pulled into an angry sneer. "I didn't *make* it! It just... sorta happened! It was a mistake, but that doesn't mean you get to have free reign in it!" Ink denied instantly.

"Of course, of course. But," Nightmare grinned viciously as his tendril lashed out, easily capturing Dream as the spirit fumbled to dodge with Ink. "Who's going to stop me? *You?* Your little golden boy?" He waved the captured spirit around tauntingly as he said this, causing Ink to tense up as Dream's weak form thrashed. "We've done it before a thousand times, we'll do it a thousand more!" Ink decreed as he slashed a slew of paint at him. Nightmare snickered as he pulled himself from the line of fire, but allowed his captive brother to linger. Dream cried out as paint slathered across his chest and neck, burning both him and the tendril that kept him restrained. The excessive negativity kept Nightmare's body regenerating at a rapid rate, however, so he just needed to deal with the brunt of the pain.

"Careful, creator," Nightmare mocked as Dream gasped and writhed in his hold. "You never know who could be caught in the crossfire." Ink backed down a bit, eyes wide as Dream called out to him desperately. The other members of Nightmare's group were beginning to surround their leader as well, reminding Ink that he was horrifically outmatched in this situation. He couldn't abandon Dream though, not after everything, not again. Dust and Killer both gave the artist vicious grins as they approached, causing the creator to back up each time they grew a little closer. The only exception was Horror, whose face remained still and neutral as he clutched his axe.

Their saving grace came by carving a large tear in reality.

Blue and Cross dropped to the ground first, armed and ready to attack the moment their feet touched the floor. Erratum landed gracefully behind the both of them, eyes already trained on the advancing group of monsters. Dust and Killer both tensed as they saw the god, exchanging looks with one another before backing up the slightest bit.

"At my side." Nightmare commanded at the change in opponents. Dust and Killer fell back immediately, sticking to either side of their leader. Nightmare narrowed his socket as he spotted Horror standing idly in place. "Horror! I said at my side!" He demanded again, causing the monster to glance back over his shoulder at him. Horror looked back at Erratum again, turning his axe in his hands. Blue and Cross tensed at the movement, but Horror rested the blade down into the snow, folding his hands over the end of the handle. He bowed his head at the group, easily showing his submission to surrender.

"*What?!"* Nightmare boomed at the show, his other two minions looking just as shocked by his actions. "You dare turn your back on *me?!* After everything I've done for you?!" The spirit snapped in outrage, the tendrils not restraining his brother lashing out in response. The tendrils seemed to freeze in place, however, as he attempted to launch them forward. Nightmare widened his eye as they, instead, turned on *him* and reared up threateningly in response.

Erratum watched with fascination as Nightmare's own body seemed to rebel against him, as though refusing a direct order much like Horror had. Cross and Blue moved forward and gave Horror firm pats on the back and shoulder, seeming to commend him for the noble move. Erratum quickly opened another portal to Farmtale, gesturing to the monster before them. "**Go, you don't belong on this battlefield. I will not make you choose between two sides.**" The instructions were simple but non-negotiable, Horror could sense that much. He gave them one last helpless look before disappearing into the rift. A shuffle from off to the left made the god turn to face Ink, who scanned over the Guardian's face a moment. If he took notice of the glasses, he said nothing of it.

"Here to destroy this world?" Ink questioned, uncertain if Erratum was

here to pose a bigger threat to him. Erratum turned their head back to face Nightmare, who seemed to have gotten control over his tendrils as they resumed lashing behind him. **"I'm here to push *him* out. The longer Nightmare is in this world, the stronger he becomes. The universe is saturated with a limitless supply of negativity, and if he is able to feed freely, it will cause *disastrous* outcomes."** Erratum's face had a grim expression on it, which Ink was inclined to believe. "All right... but that doesn't mean I'm siding with you for anything. We have a common goal, okay? That's it."

"That's fine by me."

Cross split off with Chara, who wielded their large glowing blade while Cross handled his Balance Daggers. Blue had his Warhammer slung over his shoulder already, bouncing in place to keep himself from simply launching forward. Ink still had his brush wielded in his hands and Errata was surrounded by their various screens. Nightmare scoffed as he pulled Dream further back out of the way of combat, still squeezing him tightly in his grasp. "Not bad, I will admit. Under normal circumstances, you'd be quite the challenge to kill." He grinned as their shadows began to swirl and condense around them, seeming to grasp at their ankles and drag them down. "But these aren't normal circumstances, are they?"

Erratum broke down into a mess of pixels, quickly removing themselves from the restraining hold and reforming a distance behind Nightmare. Ink simply swiped his brush against the ground, overriding the shadows in a blob of paint before breaking away. Cross spotted Erratum from behind Nightmare, moving quickly with Chara to keep the spirit's attention on them to allow them to work. Nightmare took to the bait, tendrils sharpening and striking out at the duo with deadly precision. Cross and Chara were able to move in sync with each other, using their connection to pull to one side or another to keep the other from injury.

While he was distracted by this, Erratum moved to lasso the tendril holding Dream with a few well-aimed strings. They concentrated and

let loose a jolt of positive light down the strings, causing the tendril to melt away and Nightmare to give a pained hiss. Dream gasped as he plummeted from the sudden release, flailing his arms to try and at least prevent from cracking his skull on the ground. "I gotcha!" Ink grinned as he caught the positive spirit from below, not even buckling under the force of him landing in his arms. Dream gave a shaky sigh of relief, allowing Ink to safely set him on the ground. Dream yelped as Ink swept him back up again suddenly, leaping back out of the way as a stray tendril slammed into the ground where they had once been standing.

"Ink!! Put me down!" Dream shouted as the artist continued to dodge stray attacks while holding the spirit in his arms. "Right, right!" Ink grinned sheepishly as he let him go, watching Dream dart toward Erratum and duck behind their firewall at a barrage of bones that followed him.

"Errata!" Erratum paused as Dream appeared beside them, gasping for air and looking already out of stamina. "**Right, right. It's a completely negative world.**" The god realized as their free hand rested directly on Dream's chest, nearly shocking him with the quick jolt of gold magic that rushed into him. Dream gasped for air, blinking a few times to reorient themselves. "Phew! That sure woke me up. Thanks!" He called out as his bow reappeared in his hands again. Erratum gave a short nod as Dream moved to begin firing off shots at his brother, trying to cut down on some of the negativity in his system.

Erratum jolted as the little screen eyepiece they had grown accustomed to seeing from time-to-time lit up the entirety of their spectacles. They blinked a few times to adjust their eyes, appreciating how it outlined targets and displayed binary for them to read. They singled out Killer, who was weaving his way through the mess of attacks to directly ambush them. Their hand ran over their screen before executing their command, the condensed beam of data and electricity shooting forth from the displayed screen. Killer swore as he threw himself out of the way of the attack, stumbling long enough for Blue to target him. The little champion swung his hammer around and slammed it into Killer's side, placing his hand above his eyes to watch

the skeleton fly off in the direction they whacked them.

"Nice shot."

"Thanks! I've been working on it!" Blue grinned back at their god with clear delight. Erratum noted as Dust veered away from them, shooting them a dirty look before launching themselves at Blue instead in retaliation. Satisfied that their champion could hold their own, Erratum advanced further to support Dream as they shot arrows at their sibling. Cross was slicing through tendrils left and right, sweating as more seemed to regenerate despite the speed he was taking them off.

"He's like a fucking hydra!" Cross complained as Chara sliced with him, both efficiently keeping Dream protected as he fired off his arrows. Nightmare growled as the positivity burned his body and the sharp pain of each slice shot up his spine. He turned his sight to Cross, grinning widely as the cyan of his eyelight pulsed brightly. Cross gasped as more shadows appeared at his feet, swirling around and crawling up his body. He gave a shout as he reached for Erratum, but the cocoon of darkness snapped shut around him before Erratum could react. The god snapped their head to Nightmare, seeing his focus held intensely on Cross.

Erratum looked to Dream, who had paused his attack at the new development. "He's trapping him in his worst nightmare!" The spirit spoke frantically, rushing forward to the dark swirling prison that had swallowed Cross up. Dream slammed his fists on it, but was instantly repelled backward at the intense negativity it shot out. "Agh... Cross's negativity is feeding into it. We can't break him out unless we stop it at the source!" He looked tearfully at Erratum, unsure what else could be done. Erratum glanced up to Nightmare and pulled a few strings from their face. **"I think I can make that happen. I just need you to pull his attention long enough for me to take aim."** Dream nodded profusely as he got as close as he could to Cross's cocoon, wincing at the negativity it brought to him.

"Brother!"

Nightmare's socket twitched from where he was focusing on Cross. "Don't start the ridiculous reformation speech, Dream!" He spat out with irritation, moving his eyelight over to peer at the opposite spirit. Erratum used that time to pixelate away and hide behind the dark cocoon, focusing their eyes on Nightmare's face. The crosshair was already locked on to where they planned to aim, they just had to be sure he was distracted enough for them to hit their mark.

"But I *know* you still have some sort of kindness in your soul! Look around you!" Dream called back, watching Nightmare's face scrunch a bit in confusion. "Even if they're doing horrible things, you have people that you care about! You try not to show it, but you *do* care! I know you're still hurting deep down, but-"

"You know NOTHING!" Nightmare snarled at the audacity the other had. "You know *nothing* of SUFFERING, Dream!" He snapped, which only earned a glare from Dream as well. "You think *I* haven't suffered Nightmare?! From you? From the villagers? From *everyone?!"* The spirit demanded of him in outrage. "My entire life I've been groomed to be a perfect little martyr, Nightmare! Someone who won't question the intentions of others or what they make me do because they all mean well. They *always* mean well. I've spent my entire *life* pleasing *everyone* around me! I've spent *years* making *everyone* happy and fixing *all* of their problems, Nightmare. But you know who I *can't* please? Who I *can't* make happy, Nightmare??" He continued to rant, knowing full well Nightmare's entire attention was on him.

"*ME!"*

Nightmare didn't have time to respond as a golden thread pierced harmlessly through the front of their skull. Erratum stood to the other side of Cross's prison, eyes closed tightly as the whispers began. They could see from Nightmare's perspective his time in Dreamtale. They

saw flashes of moments with Dream, could smell the old pages of his tomes, could feel the harsh blows of stones, and hear the cruel words of others. They briefly saw the Tree of feelings, decaying and glowing with dark apples.

Above all, however, they could hear screaming. A screaming wail for help, a call for mercy. A call for *Errata.*

Erratum pulled away with a gasp, eyes wide as they looked around. Their body felt weaker, but they hadn't pushed themselves the way they had with Ink. Nightmare was dazed and stumbling back while Cross collapsed forward onto the ground. Dream was quickly at his side, soothing him and encouraging him to get back to his feet. Chara swung their arm around his shoulders and helped hoist him up, griping at him for letting his guard down in the first place. Dream turned to see the searching look on Erratum's face, curious as to what they had seen.

Erratum looked back at Dream with wide eyes, as though they had made a shocking revelation.

"Keep back and hold off the others. There's... something I have to try."

Dream was too confused to argue with them, and by the time they registered it, the god was already heading straight toward Nightmare. Blue reacted quickly by holding off Dust, deflecting his sharpened bone attacks and blocking powerful blasters. Chara swiped at Killer as he tried to slide past them to provide Nightmare more protection, and Dream managed to get a good shot in the shoulder to him. It only slowed him down, but it was enough for Cross to recover and place him in a reverse chokehold. Erratum was dodging and blocking vicious tendrils as they lashed out and attacked them, but they never retaliated. Their hands began to glow a bright gold once more, imbibed with the positivity granted to them by the Guardians above. Nightmare snarled at them as they were soon upon him as close as

they could get. Before the other could react, however, Erratum brought their hand down over his face and *swiped.*

The god gasped as the tar sloughed away onto the ground below them.

The right side of Nightmare's face remained thick with negativity, but the other side...

On the other side, Erratum could see pristine bone and a frightened violet eyelight staring up at them. The terrified being gave several gasps, as though coming up for air for the first time.

"Er..rata...help...ple.." He spoke in between gasps, his face turning more and more frantic as he spoke. Erratum was stunned, holding onto both of his shoulders to keep him from thrashing or pulling away. "**I...I'm trying, I am. I don't... I'll fix this... somehow...**" Erratum swore as their hands squeezed his shoulders tighter.

"Nighty?!" Dream cried out as he caught a glimpse of what Erratum was seeing. He was rushing forward toward the two of them, tears in his sockets. Erratum gasped as a tendril wrapped around their throat, lifting them into the air before tossing them carelessly away. The god collided with Dream, bringing them both down painfully to the ground. Nightmare began to gasp louder as the thick substance began to bubble and crawl back up over the bone.

"NO! PLEASE! DREAM! DREAM! DREAAA**AAAUGH!!**"

The sound was swallowed up as the liquid negativity poured into his mouth, soon swallowing up the remainder of him into the goopy form once more. The teal eyelight reignited with a fierce glow, showing nothing but contempt toward them. "NIGHTY! PLEASE! NO, PLEASE! COME BACK!" Dream screamed out as he struggled back up to his feet, reaching out with a shaky hand.

"HE'S NOT *HERE!"*

Dream flinched backward with a shaky hitch of his breath, tears streaming down his face. Nightmare growled as his tendrils raised up once more at them threateningly. "You can't have him! *I* will keep him. *ForEVER.* He's *MINE!"* The darker spirit could see the various looks of shock, mostly on the faces of his subordinates. He cursed before opening a portal behind him, deciding it was better to abandon this attempt in order to protect both of themselves. Dream sobbed as his brother vanished, his two minions following soon after him.

The field was full of nothing but gasping breaths and harsh, heartbreaking cries. Ink had come to crouch beside Dream, hands resting comfortingly on him with a confused but concerned expression.

Erratum stood in the aftermath of it all, trying to understand what they had seen and what it could mean. They stared down at their own hands, still seeing a smudge of black against them where they had pulled away the negativity.

"**Go... I still have work to do.**" Erratum spoke lowly, needing to both be alone with their thoughts and to absorb this world.

"But you'll-!"

"Ink,"

The artist paused at Dream's broken voice. The spirit gazed up at him with such anguish it even made the hollow feeling in his chest feel denser. "Please... let's just go. I... I want to leave." He pleaded with him weakly. Ink sighed heavily through their nose, but nodded as he lifted Dream once more. He didn't complain this time, limply laying his head against the creator's chest. Ink spared one last hard glare at Erratum before disappearing in a swirl of ink. Cross reformed with Chara, sighing shakily as he recovered from his own trauma from being in Nightmare's grasp.

"**You two as well, you can't be here while I do this.**" They reminded the two champions. "Sure just... come right back, okay? I think we should talk about all of this. I sure as hell need to..." Cross muttered the last part as they opened a rift back to Erratum's plane. Blue followed in after him, shooting a worried glance back at Erratum as they left. Erratum nodded weakly as their hands moved to begin collecting the data and code into a condensed ball.

"**Yes... yes, we should.**"

Chapter End Notes

WELP.

Now listen, I promise you this is going to be explained in further detail in the coming chapters, all right? Before you panic about what's going to happen to Nightmare's character just shhh. Shhh, okay? I got this.

Also shoutout to my friend I write with a lot, Destiny as you'd know em, who was literally talking about a similar headcanon

about Nightmare on call while I was writing this that had me dying inside not being able to talk about how ACCURATE it was. I was literally slamming my hands on my desk the whole time trying to keep it in.

Chapter 27: Brother, my brother

Chapter Summary

Dream learns a bit more about Ink's 'muses' while Erratum tries to find a solution to Nightmare's ailment.

Both deities come together and, through careful planning, ready themselves for their riskiest confrontation yet.

Chapter Notes

I'm glad everyone was chill about the whole Nightmare thing. I've been having a ton of fun reading everyone's responses to what's gone down, so I'm glad you're all invested!

https://discord.gg/ZwU9Yfuh

I have also created a little server for people to come to talk, exchange stories and other works, and just generally hang out.

Now, a chapter I've been building up to for a while.

Enjoy

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Dream clutched onto the weighted blanket around his shoulders. His mind was still holding tight to the image of his brother, screaming and being swallowed up by the negativity on his body. He was certain it would haunt him for days to come, but he had soldiered through worse. Ink frowned as he picked at a loose thread on the couch, not saying anything as he was uncertain how to help at this point.

"Hey Ink..."

Ink perked up a bit, glancing at Dream quickly as the spirit addressed him. He wasn't looking at him, but Ink counted his acknowledgment

as a win. "Yeah?" He tried not to sound too eager, not wanting his intent to be misread. Dream didn't comment on it, furrowing his brow bones as he mulled over what to say. "Why..." He started, pulling the blanket closer. "Why did those universes collide? I thought you said you'd be careful..."

Ink frowned as he looked away again, staring at the wall at the accusatory question. He didn't blame Dream for being a bit bitter about it, he was a bit bitter toward himself for it as well. He wanted the other to understand though. So *badly* did he want him to get it, for *someone* to get it.

"Remember when I said I went into a sort of depression after Dreamtale?"

Dream finally looked up at Ink, surprised by the sudden question. "Yeah... you said something changed." He recalled, wondering if the other was truly about to open up about something that personal. "Well," Ink started, glancing back and seeing he had captured Dream's attention. "Can I... tell you something? And maybe you'll just kind of humor me? Even if it seems farfetched?" He half pleaded, looking a touch desperate as he did so. Dream nodded slowly at the question, not needing any convincing after what he already knew. "I promise Ink, I will take you very seriously."

The artist seemed to appreciate this as he looked down at the floor. "I'm not sure how long I sat in this place, just numb and refusing to take my paints, but at some point I... I started to hear stuff." He glanced quickly to Dream, trying to judge if the other was taking him seriously. The spirit sat quietly, giving him his full attention and nodding. "So... I ignored them at first, too numb to do much else. Eventually, though, it was like I... I couldn't control my body. I heard all these ideas in my mind for stories, for worlds, for people. I didn't have the emotional drive to do it, but I still felt the need to follow through on these ideas. I was kind of just going through the motions, robotically making these worlds. When I finally took a break, when the voices were quiet, I took my paints for the first time in a while. It was... I was so confused." He frowned as he moved to start sketching,

letting his hands scribble to ease his anxiety.

"So," Dream started, turning his body more to face the uncomfortable creator. "You hear like, people? They give you ideas?" He questioned, curious to see Ink's perspective on it. Ink nodded slowly, seeming hesitant to do so. "Yeah... Creators. I hear the Creators whisper their wants to me, what they wish to see. It was so... neat! I mean, these guys inspired so many great worlds I never would have thought of! Dancetale? I mean how cool is that concept! Outertale? It's such an amazing and, frankly, out-of-this-world universe!" This brought a laugh out of both of them, lightening the atmosphere a bit. As their laughs died down, Ink deflated just the smallest bit.

"Then..."

Dream was immediately attentive again.

"They... they got more forceful, *demanding*. They were *bored* with these happy, pretty worlds I was making. That, uh... that started something new." Ink admitted as his pencil tapped against the page anxiously. "When... when they started giving me details about a world they simply called "Something New' I started feeling hesitant. It didn't make sense to me and I thought the world cruel and, well, lame honestly! Sans siding with Chara because he's worn down by them asking? Boring! It didn't strike me as believable. Then they insisted that it was due to the 'player' hacking the files to make it happen." Ink rolled his eyes, as though recalling the conversation. "I still thought it was dumb though, so I scrapped the idea. They... they didn't like that."

Dream scooted closer to Ink, moving the end of his weighted blanket to drape over him as well. The artist gave him a grateful smile, setting his sketchbook down and scooting a bit closer to the spirit. "I tried to keep carrying on like I did, making universes that I thought were interesting. They got louder though, and they got irate the longer I ignored them. It got to the point where the screaming was so loud I couldn't think of anything else. I begged for them to stop, but they

refused to stop demanding for this world. I... finally caved and started working on it. The more I worked on it, the quieter the Creators got, the happier they became."

"That sounds... awful, Ink." Dream spoke quietly, feeling his soul clench painfully. "I can't imagine what that must be like. I never would have guessed you were dealing with that. Is there any reason you never mentioned this before?" He questioned as Ink clenched his fists tighter. "Would you have believed me? Would anyone have believed me?" Ink looked at him, able to discern the answer by the look on Dream's face. "Are they... are they still loud?" Dream ventured after a moment. "Sometimes." Ink muttered as he hunched his shoulders. "They wanted me to start making the universes closer together, away from the main sphere where I keep everything. They thought if I kept them away from the majority of the AUs, Errata will have a harder time detecting these worlds being made. Then... well, you saw what happened. That terrible universe, that Help_tale, formed when they all touched." He shuddered a bit. "So why would they have you make them all so close together again?" Dream couldn't understand the thought process behind it.

"Because they wanted to recreate that world."

Dream froze at this disturbing realization, blinking wide-eyed at Ink. The artist nodded a bit, feeling the horror radiating off the spirit. "Errata destroyed that first world shortly after it was made, before I could really even get a look at it. I fought for *weeks* to not make copies of other universes to be subjected to the same fate. After Errata came and... did whatever they did to my mind, I wound up giving in. My head just hurt so much from everything." Ink admitted shamefully, hand skimming across his vials before withdrawing a blue one. "I knew it was doomed to become another one of those worlds... but I did it anyway. Just to make the Creators stop." He sounded guilty, at least, Dream thought so.

"Oh, Ink..." Dream leaned into him, wrapping his arms tightly around the artist. "I don't blame you, okay? You're suffering so much... more than you're letting anyone else see. I wish you would have told me

though! You know I wouldn't have thought you were crazy or making it up!" He lightly chided him. Ink gave a weak smile as he rested a hand on one of Dream's knees. "Yeah... but I was still afraid. But, after today, you deserved to know. It wouldn't be fair for me to keep you in the dark."

Dream closed his eyes as he held onto him, nodding against him. "Thank you, Ink, for trusting me."

There had been an emergency 'meeting' at Erratum's altar after everything that happened. They briefly discussed the entire situation before turning their attention to Cross and what he had experienced. There were many tears and the champion had wept through most of his explanation.

"It felt like I was in there for days. I was stuck, just... back there again. Trying to make it stop. Trying to escape. It was so lonely, so painful..."

Everyone had taken a break from discussing Nightmare to soothe the guard instead, deciding it was much more pressing. Erratum had been surprised that Dream hadn't immediately appeared and dropped a slew of questions on them. They assumed he was busy with the creator, however, after everything that happened. The god was left pondering over what they had heard and seen, staring at their hands as the gold colour of their magic flickered at their command. Whatever this magic had done was obviously not strong enough to ward off the negativity covering the monster, as it seemed to act with a mind of its own.

Erratum believed, however, it *did* have a mind of its own. After

Nightmare's declaration to keep the monster underneath forever, it was clear that they were operating on different sentience. It disturbed the god to think how the other had been virtually trapped in their own body all this time. Such suffering they must have gone through, just like so many others around them. All of these worlds without anyone to turn to that could make it better, who could take the reigns from them so they wouldn't have to think. It was something we had the ability to do, however. That's why we were here, after all, to enforce-

The god closed their eyes as they allowed their mind to go quiet, packing away the noise and compartmentalizing the thoughts. When they opened their eyes again, they still hadn't come up with any solutions to the problem at hand. Even sitting in contemplation for days had yielded very few fruitful ideas, most of which were quickly tossed aside after further thought. They heaved a heavy sigh as frustration began to further mount.

"Heya, E!"

Erratum gave a faint smile as T.K plopped themselves cross-legged in front of them. "You've been sitting here for a long time, you know that? You were sitting here yesterday when I was training with Reaper!" He informed the god, who simply nodded in agreement. "Whatcha thinkin' about?" He questioned curiously, leaning in a bit to give them his full attention. Erratum hummed, feeling their mood soften at the innocent nature of this child. **"Many things, little Stopwatch. Trying to solve a problem that continues to puzzle me."** The god replied as the small champion listened attentively. "Well, whenever I can't figure something out, I usually have to take a break from thinking about it. Sometimes the answer just comes to me while I'm doing something else!" He informed the god, who could only chuckle quietly.

"All right, then what do you propose I do?" They challenged, watching as T.K got to his feet quickly and tugged them along. "You can watch me practice! You're supposed to be the one watching over me anyway, so do your job!" Erratum just continued to give amused

laughs as they allowed themselves to be pulled along. The two soon came across Reaper, who was looking slightly impatient until he spotted the both of them.

"Lose something?"

"I swear, children are hard to keep still." Reaper sighed as the young champion gave him a cheeky grin. "Are you ready to try this now?" The demigod questioned, seeing the child give a firm nod in response. "All right, now, you've done well getting a seed to sprout and revert back to a seed. Today, we're going to do something similar, but a bit more advanced." Reaper moved his hand to a wild daisy, allowing his magic to properly flow as they touched it. The flower soon wilted and blackened, quickly dying from the touch. "While death is very much something that should remain permanent, this flower has no soul to be reaped. Reversing the effects put upon the flower can restore it back to life, but I must emphasize once more, that this power is *not* something to be used to return a deceased soul back to life."

"I hear ya, gramps, sheesh." T.K scoffed at the intense warning, causing Reapers feathers to bristle a moment. "Relax," Geno smiled from beside him, moving his hands to gently fix his feathers. "You're doing a great job, a very good teacher." He praised, which seemed to stroke the wounded ego of his partner. T.K rolled his eyes as he sat on his knees in front of the dead flower and concentrated. Light blue magic collected in their hands as their left eyelight sparked into a bright blue clock face. Erratum watched with fascination as one of the clock hands wound backward, the flower slowly revitalizing and returning to its previous healthy state.

"Very good, well done." Reaper praised as the champion leaned back on his hands, panting a bit but looking beyond pleased. Erratum gave a small clap as well, genuinely impressed by his ability to-

Their hands paused mid-clap, eyes wide in thought.

"**Reaper?**" They spoke, drawing the attention of all three participants. "**I believe I will be taking over these sessions for a little bit if that is acceptable.**" Reaper seemed surprised by the request but nodded his head. "Sure, you're the one in charge after all. Can I ask why the sudden interest?" He could see the gleam in the Guardian's eye, which only made him more suspicious.

"**Just... a stroke of inspiration, I suppose.**"

It had been many years since he had been here. It was usually too painful for him to even consider.

Dream ran his fingers around one of the rings of the large tree stump, feeling a heavy sorrow in his soul. He would never forget waking up and finding his entire life had been turned on its head. He gave a sad sigh as he rested both elbows on the stump, clasping his hands together and closing his eyes. He sat there for a while, listening to the absolute stillness in the air, unbroken by even a slight breeze.

"**You know you can reach me other ways.**"

Dream turned his body around with a sad smile, seeing the Guardian towering over him. "Yeah... but this felt more symbolic." He replied before getting back to his feet. "I guess you already kind of know why I called you..." He spoke quietly, looking down at the ground.

"**Indeed, and I *think* I already have an answer for you.**"

Dream's head snapped up at this, staring in wide-eyed confusion. "Wh-but wait, how? I...I mean, I would be amazed! But-" He stammered, not expecting this response at all. Erratum nodded as they held their hand out a moment. "**Would you mind summoning your bow for me?**" They requested, much to Dream's confusion. The spirit slowly moved to call it forth, handing it over to the Guardian with a bit of hesitation. Erratum admired the wood a moment before moving their hand to pluck away the bowstring.

"Ah, please! Please don't break it, it's the only thing I have left of my mother!" Dream pleaded with them frantically, only to be gently hushed by the god. They strung a thick chord of golden string to replace the broken one, the carvings on the bow lighting up a bright gold. Dream took the bow back and admired it, running his fingers along the grooves. "It's very pretty, but I'm not sure how-" He blinked as Erratum simply moved to open a new rift, a smaller child bouncing out of it excitedly.

"Hi Dream!" T.K waved at him with enthusiasm, seeming rather excited. Dream gave a slow wave back, looking incredibly confused. "**Dream, can you create a positivity arrow for us?**" Again, a strange request, but Dream complied anyway. The golden arrow rested in his hand, thrumming with positivity that had been pulled from Dream's body. Erratum thanked him as they took it, handing it over to the small child.

"Okay, you know what to do."

T.K stuck his tongue out in concentration as the clockface reappeared in his eye. Light blue magic swirled around the arrow, carving its way through to intertwine with the positive magic. T.K eventually slumped with an exhausted huff, sweat beading down their skull. "Phew... okay... hah... done." He announced before handing the arrow back. Erratum turned it over in their hands, seeming satisfied by what they observed. "**Thank you, Stopwatch, this is exactly what we need.**" Erratum praised the child, who gave a thumbs up and grinned. "Cool... I'm gonna go nap for like, seven hours." He informed as they stumbled back through the rift.

"Um... so...?" Dream questioned as the rift closed and Erratum turned their attention on him again. "**I believe I have found a combination of my magic, your positive magic, and the influence of Time's magic to neutralize Nightmare's soul.**" Dream stiffened in shock, trying not to let the rising Hope in his soul overpower his rational thought. "W-Wait! How did you come to that conclusion??" He backpedaled, trying to follow their thought process. "**Your positivity combined with the powers Hope and Faith gave me, which I've infused through your weapon, and Time's ability to revert backward should, in theory, be enough to pull him forth again.**"

"Pull him forth... you say that like what he is now isn't him." Dream noted, though, after their last encounter, that wasn't too surprising. "**Yes, and no. Nightmare has always been there, but the collective consciousness of the negativity has surrounded him. I'm uncertain why it behaves the way it does by entrapping him and taking over like a parasite, but-**"

"Wait!" Dream gasped, cutting them off. "Ink said when the apples turned and the villagers targeted him, he influenced the story again! He said he didn't know what would happen for sure if Nightmare ate one of the apples, but that he knew the other needed the strength from them to survive. He said he never intended for him to eat all of them, that once he had one another force compelled him to keep going." Erratum looked baffled by this information. "**That's... that's nothing like...**"

"I thought the same." Dream agreed with a frown. "But... the things he told me, Errata. He wasn't lying, I *know* he wasn't lying. He is a terrible liar, and I would have been able to sense him trying to deceive me. I think... I really think my world was way more than some experiment." He shook his head, pulling himself out of the reverie. "That's a story for another time though! About this arrow..."

Erratum slowly nodded as they filed this away for later. "**Right, we only have *one* shot at this. Stopwatch is powerful for his age, but**

he can only manage one of these at a time before needing a long rest. You have to make the shot count." They were firm as they spoke, trying to drive home how important it was to successfully fire off this arrow. "Okay, got it. I'm a good shot, I can do that. Where am I supposed to aim, though?" He frowned.

"**Have you ever shot an apple off of someone's head as practice?**" Dream was confused by the question but slowly nodded. "Yeah... I saw it in a movie and wanted to try." He replied as Erratum stepped closer. The god angled Dream's hand until the point of the arrow rested against Erratum's chest.

Dream balked as he realized what they were saying. "I-I can't do that! T-That'll kill him!"

Erratum shook their head, however. "**Not with how we're doing this. I wouldn't go through with this if I thought there was even a chance that it would do something that drastic.**" They assured him, but Dream still looked extremely uneasy. "**Dream, I promised you that I would find some way to do this. I asked you to hold me to it, and now I'm asking you to trust me to follow through.**" Dream looked down at the arrow in his hand, clenching tighter to it after a moment.

"Okay..."

"**Great, because he'll be here soon.**" Dream jolted at this statement, staring at them with alarm. "H-How do you know that? He never comes to Dreamtale! Neither of us comes here for... obvious reasons." He trailed off, a saddened look in his eyes. Erratum furrowed their brow bones a moment as they glanced down at Dream. "**Dream,**" They spoke, glancing up as the sky got dark with clouds.

"**Nightmare *lives* here.**"

Dream could barely register this statement as a dark, familiar laugh broke through the area. Dream swiftly slid the arrow into a strap on his back, knowing he needed to be completely confident to fire it off. Nightmare soon appeared from the shadows, grin tight and malicious as he scanned over the both of them. "What do we have here? I had sensed your pathetic aura, Dream, but I hadn't realized you brought a *guest.* Oh, is this supposed to be a rescue mission then?" He mocked, watching as Dream's hands trembled on his bow while Erratum stood there calmly as always. "Something like that." Dream replied, trying to steady his breathing as the darker twin snickered and flicked his tendrils.

"How cute,"

He lashed one tendril out, knocking Dream off his feet with ease while Erratum dodged with more grace. Dream knew he needed to get his emotions under control to fight properly, but it was so difficult to do when a presented chance to help his brother was burning a metaphorical hole in his back. "Your inner turmoil only makes me stronger." Nightmare drawled as Dream pushed himself back up to his feet, firing off one of his normal positive arrows at him in retaliation. Erratum executed their own condensed beam through verse, causing the darker spirit to dodge the strong blast and in turn, take the arrow in the shoulder. He hissed as one tendril came to yank it out, glowering at the both of them.

"Why won't you just let him go?! Why are you doing this?!" Dream demanded as he continued to rapid-fire arrows at him, frustration and a hint of rage behind each shot. "I've kept him for this long, why would I let him go now?" Nightmare sneered back, wincing with every arrow that managed to land. "Accept that you failed him! That when he truly needed it, ***I*** was the one there. ***I'M*** the reason he's alive!"

"Is that living to you?!" Dream demanded as his bow turned into a staff, clashing against the other. Nightmare's tendrils wrapped around the staff reflexively, hissing as it burned him with positive magic. "You

might as well give in! You can't overpower the both of us!" Dream reminded him as the butt of his staff slammed him in the chest. Nightmare grunted as he staggered backward, clutching his chest while his tendrils swished irritably. He stepped back, intending to retreat back to his home and collect his subordinates for support. As he moved to summon his portal, however, the dark swirl merely sputtered before going out.

"**I've locked this world down. There will be no portals opened in this universe for as long as I have it locked.**" Erratum informed, hand stroking the screen of their console. Nightmare hissed and reared his tendrils up again, feeling cornered quickly by the both of them. "**Surrender to us and we can fix this. We can rebalance your soul.**" They continued firmly, their console vanishing again as Dream moved beside them. Nightmare knew they were both going to fight him until they submitted, but he still had one last thing to try. He knew of *one thing* that he could attempt after his time in Erratum's mind.

"That's what you want, isn't it?" He began, catching Erratum's full attention. "To fix things, to rebalance everything. You crave to be the one to reshape this multiverse into what you believe would be the most ideal existence. You just *know* that if you were the one in total control that everything would simply be as it should." He could see the tensing of the other's body, which only made him grin more. "And you're *right.* This multiverse is helpless, you've seen that yourself. No matter how many times you fix something, a thousand more things go wrong. Nothing *stays* fixed because perfect balance can't exist when everyone is simply allowed to do whatever they wish."

"Nightmare, what are you talking about?" Dream was completely lost, but he could tell the other wasn't speaking to him. He could sense the tension and anxiety radiating from Erratum, and combined with the words Nightmare was feeding them, it made him extremely concerned. "T-That's not true!" He cut in, sensing this was beginning to go wrong. "Just because nothing stays perfect doesn't mean it's bad! It's the natural order of the universe to have fluctuations!" He insisted. "Oh? I don't believe that's your call." Nightmare smirked. "I think that was supposed to be a matter between the Guardians when

they *created* this multiverse." He hummed, tilting his head a bit. "If they sent *you* down here, a Guardian of Order, then that must mean you are here to take control of it. To *ensure* it remains exactly as it should be."

Erratum's head was throbbing as they continued to shove thought after thought down into the recesses of their mind. Nightmare was trying to get to them from every angle in ways Erratum hadn't been prepared for. They expected Nightmare to lie, to swindle, to attack in order to ensure a victory. They didn't expect him to pull things out of the air that had been locked away in a protected mental barrier.

"Your expression, you know it's true." Nightmare continued at the strained look on their face. "You have rightful claim over this multiverse. Its very being is at the *tips of your fingers.* All of that power and all of these resources and you believe you are simply meant to sit and act when it seems right?"

"It would be easier to keep a balance if there weren't those intentionally disturbing the order!" Dream snapped, to which Nightmare snickered. "Fair point, but I can see it so clearly now. Errata," He sharpened his eye as he stared them down. "I have the resources to help you get there. My foolish brother and his ridiculous light-aligned allies would never understand your true purpose. They'd brand you as a power-hungry menace, something I can sympathize with. I can promise to uphold my side of the balance in return, as much as it pains me. All I ask is you let me show you the way, the *true* way, to fix this multiverse. And the only way is through *you."*

Erratum was quiet as they took in his words, soul thrumming wildly in their chest as the tension rose. Was the other wrong, though? Everything he said, everything even slightly *implied* was points that circled their own mind. Even watching Nightmare partially swallow his own pride to admit he needed to retain balance through this revelation was... it was hard to turn away from.

"Errata, you can't... you can't be *seriously* thinking about this!"

There was that uncertain tone, one that showed Dream *did* fear us being a power-hungry beast. Others constantly look to us to fix things but the very idea of us fully doing our job sends them on the defense instantly. None of them have our power; none of them have the responsibility of keeping the multiverse alive on their shoulders.

Erratum took a hesitant step forward.

Nightmare's tendrils curled together in delight while Dream gave a shocked hitch of the breath.

"That's right... I knew you would one day realize it." Nightmare soothed as the Guardian turned their head to look back at Dream one last time. Erratum tightened their jaw before crossing the field completely to Nightmare's side, allowing the tendrils to move and stroke at their face and neck reverently. "They could never treat you the way a god should be treated." He spoke lowly, turning their head as he fed off of Dream's intense suffering. "You're a fool, Dream." He informed the spirit as his tendrils retreated back again, swaying in obvious delight. "You use a Guardian like an errand boy and this is what happens. Give them the respect they *deserve,* and you can see their true potential. You can help them reach new heights." He sneered at him. Erratum placed a hand on Nightmare's shoulder, seeming to pacify him to prevent more fighting. He huffed reluctantly, still glowering at Dream.

Erratum moved their arms to wrap around Nightmare from behind, further burning Dream as betrayal stabbed through his soul. The Guardian looked Dream in the eye, however, and he could suddenly feel a shift.

The god's arm tightened around Nightmare's neck, forcing it upward

as his other hand began to glow a vibrant gold.

"***NOW,* DREAM!**" They shouted as their hand came down to his chest, grasping onto the front of their shirt and tearing it as they sloughed away negativity. The pristine, cracked white bone showed through the negativity, Nightmare giving outraged screeches as his tendrils attempted to impale and choke the Guardian behind him. Dream withdrew the arrow from his back, aiming quickly with terror in his soul.

He exhaled slowly as he released the arrow, watching it soar toward its target. The heavy negativity was already bubbling back up quickly to try and cover the bone once more. Just as it encroached up to his ribs, the arrow struck true, the dark negativity stalling just around the area. Nightmare stiffened, tendrils going limp as they slid off of the wounded Guardian behind him.

"**Shhh...**" Erratum soothed, gently easing the gasping spirit down onto his back. Dream tossed his bow aside and rushed toward them, tears flowing from his eyes as he dropped down beside Nightmare. His hands shook as he observed the arrow stuck straight through his sternum. Erratum shook their head as he moved to pull it out, only making Dream whimper more in distress.

"Is this... what you wanted?"

Dream sniffled as Nightmare stared up at him, eye hazy and breathing shallow. "Are you... happy? I bet you are... you'd love to see me die." The dark twin croaked, pulling painful sobs from his brother.

"**Shhh...**" Erratum hushed once more, placing a hand on the side of Nightmare's face. "**You are not dying... and you will not be destroyed.**" They assured the confused monster. "**However, it's time. It's time for you to let him go.**" They murmured gently to

him. "**You've done good... you've kept him alive, but this isn't the village. There isn't anyone for you to keep them hidden from. You will always be with him, but you *must* let him free.**" The Guardian watched the features on his face twist to one of slight fear, the sludge beginning to drip from his form.

"...I'm scared."

"**I know you are,**" The Guardian soothed, watching this spirit with such sorrow. "**But it's time.**" Dream was watching with confusion, weak sobs still escaping his mouth every so often. Nightmare closed his eye momentarily, shuddering as though trying to fight it.

"You... Errata," Said god nodded at his acknowledgment. "You keep him safe too." Nightmare managed, the words sounding more like a command than a question. "**I believe between the both of us, he will be just fine.**"

Nightmare gave a long exhale after this, the dark tar on his body coalescing together before sinking down through the spirit's chest, breaking the arrow. Erratum could see the shattered side of Nightmare's skull, caved in from the supraorbital process up to the sphenoid bone. They watched as the dark negativity suddenly reemerged through the broken structure, coating the side of his skull to keep that side of his skull stable.

Slowly, Nightmare's eyes slid open. Erratum noticed that the corrupted side had the familiar teal eyelight while the other had that violet one they had briefly caught a glimpse of before. Dream leaned forward, gasping as his hands fumbled in an attempt to grab the other's hands. Nightmare's hands clumsily moved from where they rested on his abdomen area, managing to grab onto Dream with a bit of a struggle.

"Dream...?" He sounded drowsy, like he'd just awoken from a long nap. Dream sniffled as he gave a weak, teary laugh.

"Welcome back, Nighty."

Chapter End Notes

Welcome back indeed.

Chapter 28: Twin champions

Chapter Summary

Erratum sits the twins down and makes them talk it out a bit. After some heartfelt words, Erratum can finally make good on a request from the Guardians.

Chapter Notes

I have received my registered nurse license, so celebratory update!

I'm very happy people were completely on board with the last chapter and what I've decided to do. Both of Nightmare's forms are too lovely for me to just dismiss. Things are... wow, getting close to seeing the end, huh? Not anytime really soon, but I can see a resolution in the future.

Enjoy

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Killer had his feet kicked up on the couch, muddy shoes staining the nice leather. He had been thinking about everything that had happened recently, specifically during their fight in that strange universe. Nightmare had been off ever since that day, locking himself away in his office and refusing anyone's request to enter. Hearing the spirit shout how he wouldn't let him go, whoever *he* was, still rung in his mind. What did it all mean?

He jolted as the main doors slammed open, immediately on guard as he spotted both Dream *and* that damn god lugging someone along. "Hey! What the hell are *you two* doing here?! You think this is some kinda safe house where you can drag your-?"

"Killer, we swear to everything above and every star in the sky, if you

don't let us through we will pull your soul back out ourselves." The skeleton between the two threatened, the tone lighter, but familiar. Killer squinted his eyes, watching as the mystery skeleton gave him a glare with dual-coloured eyes, black sludge covering the side of his face.

"Boss??" Killer sputtered, recognizing him despite his vastly different appearance. "What's going on? What are they doing here?
What *happened* to you?!"

"Shut up!" Nightmare snapped as the other pestered him with questions. "And clean that couch! We don't want to see one muddy footprint by the time we're done in our office!" He demanded as the three brushed past him. Killer watched with muted confusion as they headed up the stairs, drawing several more confused looks from other members of the manor as they stuck their heads out of various rooms.

Erratum closed the door behind them as they entered Nightmare's office, separating them from the prying eyes of the others. They helped Nightmare settle behind his desk, watching him slump into the chair with an exhausted sigh. Dream was hovering nearby, seeming to want to fret over his brother's condition. Errata stood quietly, waiting for Nightmare to say anything. Finally, the spirit opened both of his eyes, gazing from Dream back to Errata.

"You..." Nightmare started, sounding in disbelief. "I...we don't know how you did it... I- we don't know how you figured that out. We... sorry, this is all a little surreal." He admitted, placing a hand on Dream's arm as the other came to hug him from his side.

"**I could only imagine.**" Erratum spoke with sympathy, seeing how much the other had suffered. Nightmare panted as one hand came to touch the side of his face, breath quickening as he felt the familiar tar substance on his face.

"Nighty! Nightmare, relax!" Dream pleaded as the other hyperventilated, hands shaking as more of the thick negativity spread down his neck as he abruptly got to his feet. Dream continued to panic, which only seemed to set Nightmare off more. Erratum moved quickly, grasping onto both of Nightmare's wrists and directing his gaze up to them.

"The more you feel powerless and afraid, the more they're going to react. They aren't there to take over your body again, only to keep you safe. If you feel like you're in danger, they're going to take more dominant control over you." Erratum soothed him, making sure the other kept watching them. **"Just look at me, Nightmare. Take a few easy breaths, and they'll know you're okay."** They instructed him.

Nightmare was staring at them with an unreadable expression but soon began to slow his breathing. The calmer his breaths became, the more the negativity receded. He sighed heavily as it finally returned to the side of his skull. He looked down, seeming to remember that his shirt had been torn open from the entire encounter. He scowled as he grabbed a replacement jacket, zipping it up over his ruined tunic. "Okay... well, that's going to take some time to adjust to. No matter, we've been through worse." He cleared his throat as he slipped away from Erratum, moving back to the side of his desk. "I don't suppose you want something from all of this?" He questioned.

"Of course not Night-"

"Yes,"

Dream balked as he gave Erratum a shocked look, though Nightmare didn't look that surprised. "Let's discuss everything, then." Nightmare nodded as he moved to sit back at his desk again, folding his hands in front of him. "What are your demands?" The darker spirit inquired, watching as the god gave a quiet laugh.

"**Nothing like that, I assure you. This is about the balance.**" Erratum explained, which seemed to make Dream look less betrayed. "**I suppose, what I'm asking for, is for the both of you to take a seat and discuss what happens next.**"

Both spirits exchanged looks with each other, seeming apprehensive at the idea of facing everything. Still, Dream sat at the seat in front of Nightmare's desk, squirming a bit under his gaze. Erratum stood nearby, watching calmly with both hands tucked together in their sleeves. Dream twisted his hands together anxiously before he finally spoke up. "I...I-I don't want to do this fighting anymore, Nightmare. I know I haven't been the best, and I know I've really dropped the ball with the whole balance thing, but I want things to be better." Dream began, glancing up nervously at his brother.

Nightmare let out a heavy sigh as he leaned forward a bit, rubbing his forehead. He moved to pull off the crown still on his head, giving it a scowl before setting it on his desk. "That's all well and good, and believe us, we'd want the same. Is it simply that easy, Dream? You must remember, we're not exactly able to show our face anywhere in the multiverse. Regardless of what we look like now, we'd be executed on sight." He reminded Dream.

"That doesn't mean we shouldn't *try,* Nightmare!" Dream protested at his reluctance. "Aren't you tired of hiding away? The balance has always been in favour of the negative emotions, so you wouldn't even have to do too much in the beginning! Just let me take care of things for a while!" He insisted, which only brought a scowl to his brother's face.

"It's so nice to see you care about the balance *now.* Where was that kind of enthusiasm when we were protecting the tree? Scratch that, when *we,*" He gestured to himself, making it clear he was speaking solely about himself. "Were protecting the tree? While you were busy running around the village?"

Dream stood up suddenly at this, looking just as outraged. "Don't act like you did everything by yourself Nightmare!" He hissed, causing Nightmare to also jump to his feet.

"Dream, our *one job* was to guard the tree. That was it! We- *I* stayed there *every day* to make sure no one would disturb the tree! Do you know..." Nightmare closed his eyes as the negativity spread down his neck again, quickly losing his composure. "Do you know how many times we had to push people back? How many times people would call you away for some bullshit problem just so they could try and swipe an apple? Do you know how much *pain* we went through keeping them all back? All the attacks? The insults? The broken bones and scrapes?!"

"How was I supposed to know when you never *told* me anything!" Dream cried, slamming his hands on the desk. "You're going to sit here and expect me to have been able to know what you were going through when you were keeping it a secret?! Why didn't you come to me? Why couldn't you just *talk* to me, Nightmare?!"

"Because they would have *killed* you Dream!"

Dream stiffened at the claim, watching as two tendrils erupted from Nightmare's back with a pained shout. The spirit winced as he rubbed at his shoulder, trying to adjust to the new weight on his uncovered spine. Nightmare looked back to Dream again with a frown. "If we had told you what they were doing to the tree, to *us,* you would have pushed them away. The only thing that kept you safe from them was their belief that you were the complete embodiment of positivity, even if you weren't quite that yet. They believed you would do anything and *everything* they asked of you, which kept them complicit, but most importantly content. If you stopped, they would have realized they had no use for *either* of the two little spirits of the tree. They knew the only way to truly get to us was through you... if they threatened to kill you or harm you, they knew we would have caved. They still had use for you, however, and hoped they could keep you while getting

the apples they wanted so much."

Dream stiffly sat back in his chair again, feeling numb by this information. He could tell by the look on Nightmare's face, though, that the other was completely serious. "No... that... that can't be true. I know... I know they used me a lot. I don't... they wouldn't have-"

"They *would* Dream!" Nightmare hissed as the tendrils on his back lashed angrily. "Why do you think we built our manor on the ruins of the village?! If there's one thing we *don't* regret about back then, it's slaughtering every one of them. Was it right? No. Do we care? Absolutely not." He emphasized every statement by slamming his fist against the desk.

"Don't say that!" Dream gasped at such a harsh statement. "You should have *told* me!"

"What were we to say?! We were in over our heads! We- I...!"

"You were both *children!"*

The two spirits fell silent, having almost forgotten the Guardian was even there. Erratum was staring at the both of them with a stern expression, having had enough of the back and forth. **"You were both put in an impossibly complex situation fit for a deity as *children.* You were expected to do the job of an adult *god* while being nothing more than little forest spirits!"** They continued with the same amount of discontent. **"I will not sit here and listen to you two shout and blame one another for something that had *always* been out of your control. You've both made mistakes, you've both been hurt, and you've both come to reconcile. You have to face the past and accept what is done, is done."**

Both spirits quietly appraised one another, seeming to mull these words over. Nightmare eventually stepped out from behind his desk, circling around it and continuing to give Dream an expectant look. "The Nightmare you knew died a *long* time ago, Dream. We aren't the same introverted child that was pushed around and tormented their entire life. We'll never be the monster you've been seeking to save."

"I know..." Dream clenched his fists tighter as he looked him in the eyes. "I know you're not... and that's okay. You told me back then, right before it all ended, to remember who you once were. And I do! I do remember who you were, and I'll never forget that Nightmare, but I want to know *you!* I know you've seen too much, done too much, lived too long to be the same Nighty that I knew. I'm okay with that! I just... I just want my brother back. You'll always be my brother, no matter what you do or what you look like." He watched as Nightmare turned his head away a moment, tendrils swishing a bit as he sighed.

"You're just as stubborn as you always were, Dream." Nightmare finally spoke after a moment, giving him a weak smile.

Dream frowned as he moved away from his seat, quickly moving around to nearly bowl the other over. Nightmare gave a huff of a laugh as the other clung to him, moving to embrace him as well, tendrils coming to encircle the both of them.

"How come you're taller than me?!" Dream sniffled as he looked up at him. Nightmare gave a quiet chuckle at this, noticing the height difference himself.

"Perhaps because there's always been more negativity in the multiverse? It fed our body and acted as an accelerator for us when we were growing." Nightmare theorized. Dream didn't seem satisfied with this as he pulled back, huffing indignantly. Dream dropped the pouting facade as he looked back up at his brother's face, seeing the smile there.

"I think the perfect place for you two to start is with a book club."

Nightmare gave the god a strange look, though he wasn't completely turned off by the idea. "Is that so?" He questioned hesitantly. Dream didn't seem to understand and waited for them to further explain.

"I think it would be a good bonding time, *and,* I think I know the book to start with." Erratum moved to open Verse, skimming through their inventory until they selected the book they were looking for. **"Ah, here it is. I thumbed through it at the request of a follower, but I think you two would benefit from it."** They spoke as Nightmare took the book curiously. His face fell flat as he glanced up at Erratum.

"*Codependent No More?* Really?"

"An excellent read I think you *both* could learn from." Erratum smiled at their offended expressions. **"Don't even begin to argue as though you don't already know."** They could see the beginnings of a protest in both of their faces. **"If you aren't aware you're horrendously codependent then read the first chapter. If you still feel that way, freely tell me I'm wrong."** They challenged both of them. Nightmare tossed the book on his desk with an unimpressed look.

"Fine..." The dark spirit grumbled, satisfying the god for the moment. He watched as Erratum opened a rift in his office, turning to look at the both of them insistently. Dream clutched onto Nightmare's wrist while one of his tendrils wrapped around the offending hand. Errata blinked at their silent response, huffing a soft laugh.

"***Both* of you, come with me.**" They clarified for them, which seemed to ease their mounting separation anxiety. Dream followed after Erratum, glancing back to ensure his brother followed. Once they were through the rift, they found themselves surrounded by a circle of temples. "**This is where the Temples of the Guardians lie, deep within Reapertale.**" Erratum explained.

Nightmare looked around with fascination, never having had the opportunity to visit this universe when he was in his previous form. "It's incredible... but why are we here?" He questioned curiously. Erratum waved them forward, guiding them along to a large open temple. There wasn't much to it; a large opening on the inside with a plate probably meant for collecting offerings and a large symbol on the ground in front of it. Nightmare recognized it as the symbol of Karma.

"**A while ago, I told you that Hope and Faith wished to speak with you both.**" Erratum spoke, looking between the both of them. "**So, I'm going to guide you through shifting into The Between. There, we shall speak to the Guardians.**" They instructed them, settling in the middle of the large symbol. "**It is easier for me to do this through Karma, for obvious reasons.**"

"You're certain about this?" Nightmare questioned, though he still settled beside the god nonetheless. Erratum could tell they were hesitant about meeting the Guardians after everything.

"**Completely.**" Erratum agreed as Dream settled in front of them, forming a triangle between them all. "**Now... simply take my hands, and close your eyes. Focus on your souls, and I will do the rest.**" They instructed as the markings over their bodies began to illuminate. Both spirits exchanged looks with one another before closing their own eyes, feeling the steady beats of their souls. Moments later, a sensation as though they were being pulled from their body overtook them, leaving them spiraling until they awoke in a floating abyss.

Erratum seemed calm enough in this strange environment, while Dream and Nightmare were flailing a bit and trying to keep their composure. A set of bright apparitions descended upon them, making the two spirits wince momentarily at their brightness. Erratum only gave a soft smile as a different entity surrounded them, bringing them comfort rather than fear.

"You've done well, as I knew you would," Karma spoke around the god, causing the two spirits to jolt at the strange voice. *"I knew you would find a way to bring them both together again. You've brought a shard of pride back to the Council."* They praised, to which Erratum simply gave a soft hum in response. The two other shapeless forms were before the two spirits, who looked on with apprehension.

"No need to be afraid! We have waited so long for the two of you! I am Hope,"

"And I am Faith. We have seen both of you from the moment you were created, and we sustained your forms when you were transcended so rapidly to deities." Faith informed the two mesmerized spirits. *"It is at our request Errata has brought you here. As twin celestial beings, it is only fitting for us to take on twin champions."*

"Wait, wait," Nightmare interrupted with surprise. "Us? You want *us* to act as your champions?" He spoke with a hint of doubt.

"Well, even though you have obviously had a marking from Magic at some point," Hope acknowledged as they stared through the spirit, who seemed surprised to hear this. *"You are not their champion, don't you worry. I believe, before they disappeared, they took pity on your plight and gave you a blessing."* Nightmare stared down at his hands a moment at this, seeming fascinated and intrigued.

"Your Faith in others and in every action you take has moved me enough to

consider you worthy." Faith informed as they surrounded Dream, who stared on with wide eyes.

"Your Hope for change and salvation, the struggle you fought to retain your sentience, and the Hope your redemption will give to others has moved me enough to consider you worthy." Hope further encroached on Nightmare, who still seemed to believe this was a giant hallucination. Faith was the first to move, fully engulfing Dream's form for a moment.

"I, Faith, declare Dream of Dreamtale as my rightful champion. And so it will be."

Dream gave a surprised shout at the sharp burning sensation that shot through his body. Erratum hadn't warned him about this part! It seemed to sear his very being before the Guardian released him again, causing his body to slump in relief. He didn't feel any different now that the burning subsided, but there was a pulsing sensation on his right scapula that seemed to remind him of his new duties. "I-I will do my best." Dream whispered, resting his fist on his chest and dipping his head.

Nightmare watched with wonder as his brother was imbibed with their power, feeling anxiety in his own chest. He glanced up as Hope momentarily surrounded him before he felt as though he were splitting apart. The sensation wasn't painful, but it was jarring when he was suddenly face-to-face with a familiar corrupted version of himself.

"You both have been with one another for centuries. Though born from suffering, the both of you now exist harmoniously with one another. May you both live your symbiotic lives in peace now, free from persecution." Hope spoke to the both of them, who stared at one another like they had so many times through the mirror.

"I...I can do that." Nightmare agreed as he watched his corrupted mirror image twist their tendrils around and nod in agreement. They both interlocked their hands, seeming to come to an understanding with one another with small, sad smiles. They combined together once more, Nightmare holding his own body in a self hug for a moment.

"Now," Hope continued, recapturing Nightmare's attention. *"I, Hope, declare Nightmare of Dreamtale as my rightful champion. And so it will be."*

Nightmare cringed instantly at the sharp pain that zapped through him. It was certainly intense, but he had shouldered and pushed through worse pain in his life. He could grit his teeth and endure it for as long as it took. It felt as though it took forever, somehow longer than Dream's had, before Hope finally pulled away. He could feel the pulsing at his left scapula immediately, reminding him of his new duties. He looked down at his hands, blinking in confusion at the dark gloves and the feeling of heavy fabric on his body.

"Oh... wow, Nightmare." Dream cooed in wonder at his sibling.

A dark, purple cloak was fastened at his neck, trailing down to the bottom of his ribcage where a darker black material lie underneath. His pants hugged tighter to his body, a dark black colour that went all the way down before disappearing into the purple and silver boots. Atop his head lay a circlet, the chain fastened around and dipping just to the center of his forehead, where it held the rune of Dagaz in its clasp.

"I felt a change of wardrobe was fitting for your new title," Hope remarked as Nightmare tried to get a good look at himself.

"Ever with the theatrics." Faith seemed to tease, both apparitions drifting away from the new champions. Both siblings gave each other

wide grins, seeming to appraise one another with pride. Erratum drifted closer to them, placing either hand on their shoulder and squeezing tightly with a similar prideful look.

"I present, for the first time, the champions of Hope and Faith."

Chapter End Notes

Yaaaay, a few of you were completely right a while back about why Faith and Hope wanted to see the twins.

Also, fun fact, I've read Codependent No More. It's a really useful tool if you have codependency problems!

Nightmare's had a fun change of wardrobe. And for those who don't know, the rune of Dagaz is a norse rune that represents night becoming day, of awakening, and depicts the balance between positive energy and negative energy.

Fitting, no?

Chapter 29: That was you

Chapter Summary

> Erratum brings their allies together to explain the new changes in their worlds. Meanwhile, Nightmare has to face his group and their scrutinizing.

Chapter Notes

> Oh hello again! I am pleased that everyone was so on board with Nightmare and everything that went down. I love experimenting with Nightmare's character (one look at Core the Apple confirms this) and this is supposed to be a fix-it type thing anyway. So, we have mercy here. Only here.
>
> Enjoy

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Erratum sighed as they made notes in Verse while their allies gave them updates on their situations. There wasn't a lot the group had to say to them that made them very hopeful for the coming future. Since the entire 'war' propaganda began, the god had been forced to begin actual meetings with those on their side. Their 'meeting room' was more of a glorified gazebo with a round table for them to gather around. They had quickly explained what was really going on and their ultimate goals to each member that joined, which was usually met with some resistance. They always took time to straighten the facts and show them the receipts and, one by one, they all fell in line.

"Can't be helped," Outer spoke as he shrugged a bit. "Sci closed off his world and any sort of help to anyone strictly aligned with Errata. Any casual passing through Outertale, for leisure or business, has been restricted in retaliation. There have already been a few scuffles regarding Ink and a few of his known followers." He reported to them, much to Erratum's continuing displeasure.

"Keep calling me when it happens, I always love breaking a few bones." Storyshift Chara smirked from where they leaned back in their chair. They had been quite resistant to joining the entire cause, even after their encounter with Cross. Erratum had shown up to explain at their request, and Chara had turned them away once more. Before the god could leave, however, Chara's brother had come wailing to them. They had apparently sustained a tear to their rainbow handkerchief and were completely inconsolable over the fact. Erratum had patiently settled on the front step of the two's home, stitching the tear and returning the article to Asriel once they had finished. Chara had spontaneously changed their mind within the thirty minutes the god had taken to repair it.

"No killing anyone outside their worlds," Geno spoke up, giving Chara a suspicious glare as he did so. He did his best to be amicable with most of the members, but he had a hard time getting past Chara's disposition. Reaper was hovering nearby, not involved with the multiverse dispute but being actively supportive of his partner. "We still don't comprehend what would happen and, frankly, I don't wanna find out." He watched as the human rolled their eyes in response to his worries.

"**Regardless,**" Erratum spoke up, capturing everyone's attention once more. "**If things escalate, *especially* with Ink directly, please reach out to me. I want there to be as little fighting as possible between universes. This is strictly a dispute between myself and the creator.**" They reminded all of them with a serious expression on their face. "**At any rate, that isn't what this meeting is about.**" This seemed to spark curiosity in the majority of them. "**There has been a change in alliances that you all must be made aware of. I'm overjoyed to report that the balance between negativity and positivity is officially out of my hands.**"

"Wait," Red spoke as he tried to comprehend this. "The hell you mean? The people who are *supposed* to be in charge of all that are Dream and Nightmare. Dream's sided with Ink on this matter and Nightmare's... *Nightmare."* He scowled a bit as he said this. Erratum smiled, however, with a pleased gleam in their eyes. "What did you do." It was a statement rather than a question from the Fell monster.

Erratum said nothing as they opened a golden rift beside themselves, allowing two new figures to step through. Dream gave them all a sheepish grin while Nightmare kept his gaze firmly away from all of them. The reaction was instantaneous, as the group began giving confused or outraged questions.

"Is that Nightmare?? What happened?!" Outer sputtered, while Geno stared on in confusion as well.

"*ERRATA,"* Geno sounded scandalized and looked just as much, glancing at Cross and Blue with disbelief. "Why am I *just now* learning about this?!" He demanded, to which Cross held his hands up innocently.

"You weren't here! You've been in your own world or with Reaper!" Cross pointed out, trying to avoid his wrath. This just caused Geno to whirl on Reaper, who looked just as alarmed by the other's glare.

"Did *you* know about this??" Geno demanded of his nervous partner.

"Geno, my dove, you-"

"I can't believe you!" Geno cut him off immediately as the other went to defend himself.

"But you would have-"

"Enough, *please."* Erratum interrupted the whirlwind of chaos before it could grow out of control. **"Nightmare has always been, in a**

sense, two separate entities. The negative embodiment that you all know, and the person underneath it all." They looked to Nightmare, gesturing for them to go on. Nightmare looked hesitant, but Dream was there to give him an encouraging nudge.

"I...well, we... Um," Nightmare fought with himself a moment, the negativity spreading down his neck as he listened to its soft voice in his mind. "Okay, yes, *I* have been sort of aware for a long time. There were more moments where I was dormant, I suppose you would call it, than actually conscious. Almost everything was entirely out of my control, but it was all done by..." He touched the side of his face a moment, feeling over the negative tar. "Well, *them.* It was some misguided attempt to keep me alive and protected after... everything. That's not what *we* want anymore, however. Now that we're finally in balance and able to coexist, we can properly take care of things again." He glanced around at the group, desperately wanting them to believe him.

"Why should we believe someone who's killed millions of people and caused so much damage?!" Red demanded as he slammed his fist on the table.

"How do we know you aren't just going along with everything for your own interest? Until something better comes along?" Chara accused further, sneering at him as they recalled their first encounter.

"What are you talking about?! There's no special interest in this for us other than *not dying!* We just want to do the job we were meant to do in the *first place!* Before this whole mess even began!" Nightmare shouted back at the accusation.

"As much as I hate saying it, I believe him." Geno frowned as he crossed his arms. "Just like the rest of us, Dream and Nightmare didn't have control over their stories. In the end, we should be questioning why Ink even... made that world."

"Yeah, I mean, according to Errata, my world existed before Dreamtale did. If the emotional balance wasn't an issue before then, why was the whole 'tree of feelings' thing necessary?" Blue spoke up as well with a confused frown.

Dream was the one to jump in on this. "No no, it's not about that!" He insisted with a wave of his hand. "There's a lot you all don't understand from Ink's perspective!" He insisted, much to Nightmare's scorn.

"I'm sure he had *nothing* to do with our previous condition." Nightmare scowled back at him. Dream frowned as he pulled his hands back to wring them together. "Yeah, we thought as much." He muttered darkly, to which Dream quickly chimed in again.

"Nightmare, he didn't mean for it to turn out that way! He was trying to protect you!"

"*Protect* us?! He wrecked our entire life!" Nightmare hissed as two tendrils erupted from his back. "Don't you tell *me* what I went through was for my own good! His 'little story' is the entire reason our lives went off the rails, Dream!"

"It wasn't like that! He thought if you ate just *one*-"

"Why are you defending him?!" Nightmare demanded, cutting Dream off. "Why are you so *certain* he's telling you the truth? After years of lying? After all this time of pain and suffering?!" He demanded of him. Dream clenched his jaw at the other's questions, tears dotting at the edges of his sockets. Nightmare scanned him over a moment, face slowly morphing into one of disbelief.

"Oh... Dream, *no. Dream...*" Nightmare sounded exasperated as he rested a hand on his forehead. "You can't seriously... not him. Why? Why *him,* Dream??" He groaned with frustration. Everyone else had grown silent at their argument, seeming to fear Nightmare would change his mind and start slaughtering them all again.

Dream didn't appear to understand what his brother was saying. "What? Nightmare, I don't-"

"You know he doesn't *feel* anything, right?"

Dream tensed a bit at this sentence, eyes wide and frightened. "That's... no, I mean, not on his own but... I mean, he chooses what-"

"Dream, *please,*" Nightmare sighed as he narrowed his eyes. "Don't... don't do that to yourself. Don't act so naive, it's not becoming of you." He narrowed his eyes at him. "If he knew you were here? Do you think he'd still 'choose' to feel how he feels about you now? If he *really* cared, he wouldn't drag you all over the multiverse in his own mess!" He could see the other turn away from him, refusing to entertain the idea. "He's not *capable* of replicating any *feelings* that aren't artificial, Dream."

"And that's so bad?! Why is that any different than having natural feelings! It's not *his* fault he doesn't have a soul!" Dream shot back at him, clenching his fists tightly. "Why... why are you all so horrible about that? Like he somehow chose this kind of life? He had just as much control as the rest of us! Can we just once not persecute one another and just try to *help* each other?!"

Nightmare fell silent at this, frown still firm on his face. Erratum gave a soft sigh as they tried to pull things back together. "**I have to agree. The goal is to find a solution, not tear each other apart in battle.**" They reminded the bunch, staring pointedly at Nightmare. "**I**

want to find a way to make this right by helping Ink. I have... one idea, but I would rather not use that as my first approach." They admitted with an unreadable expression. "**For now, I think we've touched upon everything we needed to. All of you are dismissed, and once again, notify me of any arising conflicts.**"

With that, each member began to reluctantly leave. The atmosphere was still rather tense once the majority of them were gone, leaving Erratum's familiar group and the twins. Erratum breathed out a silent breath as the twins avoided each other's gazes, probably still stubbornly clinging to their beliefs. They shook their head a bit in disapproval, only moving away at the call of Geno. Erratum could see the rather chastised expression on Reaper's face as they got closer, which was admittedly a bit amusing.

"Hey, um, I know this isn't the most ideal time," Geno started with a nervous laugh. "We wanted to ask if it was okay if we, like... lived here?" He questioned, much to the surprise of the god. "Just! You know!" He sputtered at the other's expression.

"Courting stuff," Reaper chuckled at his partner's embarrassment. "Reapertale is out of the question. I wouldn't want to overwhelm my dove with that kind of environment." He explained though Geno gave him a dirty look at the remark.

"And as much as I love my family and having my world again, just... no." Geno chuckled weakly. "I don't really feel like I fit into their dynamic anyway, so I'm all right with moving out. It's not like I can't visit them whenever I want." He added. "So, yeah, we were wondering...?"

"**Of course,**" Erratum insisted with a pleasant smile. "**I told you a while back that you'd always have a home in me should you ever need it.**" They reminded him, causing the other to huff and turn his head away.

"Yeah... was kinda relying on that," Geno admitted, causing the Guardian to give an amused laugh. "Whatever! Just... I hope you don't mind me saying we don't exactly want to live *outside*."

"I assumed so, and that won't be an issue. I am more than capable of designing something like I did for the Temmies."

"You did what?" Geno questioned with a blink. "Temmies? Plural? Multiple?"

"Fresh."

"Ah, that makes more sense."

Nightmare paced anxiously in the main hall, extremely aware of the eyes on him. His tendrils swished a bit, prodding at the clean side of his face as though to draw his attention. He merely batted them away with a frown. Erratum had assured him they would be sending a rather reluctant Horror back to hear Nightmare out, and the dark spirit was trepidatious at best. Horror had turned so quickly in battle to Erratum's side and, as bitter as it made him feel, he couldn't even really blame him. Seeing how Horror had gone from mute and skittish to having enough magic to do simple attacks made him realize he had more than just failed Horror.

His thoughts were interrupted as a bright rift opened up, the anxious

monster in question being pushed through to the other side. The rift closed just as quickly, and both monsters realized that Erratum expected them to work it out without them mediating. Horror was staring at him with obvious hesitation, looking like they'd rather be anywhere but here. Nightmare cleared his throat, trying to collect himself enough to start this conversation.

"We... we're sorry." Nightmare glanced back at the others as they crowded the room as well.

"*We?"* Horror questioned curiously. Their eyelight trailed between the dual-coloured eyelights the other possessed, humming a bit before nodding. "Different... people?"

"Sort of, it's..." Nightmare sighed as he glanced away. "It's hard to explain. I, *me,*" He tapped the clean side of his skull. "I've always been there, for the most part. I didn't have a lot of control, not until more recently. It started when I first encountered Errata, when they grabbed one of my tendrils. When the negativity turned to liquid under their grasp, a little part of me felt... more aware." He attempted to explain.

"So you're not *really* our Boss? You're just kinda... what, the gooey emotional center?" Killer spoke with a raised brow bone. "You're just the soft little skeleton underneath." This seemed to strike a wrong cord, as the liquid negativity spread up to the top of his skull and down his neck, leaving the others a bit surprised.

"We think you've missed the part about how *we* have always been here." Nightmare sneered as the tendrils curled irritably. "You think we're different? That we aren't the same Nightmare that killed countless souls and corrupted dozens of worlds? *This,"* They gestured to themselves with a glare. "Is as close to the real Nightmare as you're gonna get!" He snapped as the skeletons exchanged looks with each other.

"Who do you think took all your night terrors? Who do you think showed restraint to you at the *very* last moment when things escalated to irrational violence? Who do you think brought you into their *home?* Them??" He scowled as the tendrils raised up threateningly. "They mean well, but the rationality and mercy are solely from *me.* They react defensively and for the sole purpose to keep the both of us alive. They aren't as versed in compassion and restraint." He panted a bit as he broke off his argument, turning his head away.

"We *know* we failed you, *all* of you, many times. We were relentless, heartless, and we failed to keep you safe when you needed it. Under our care, you should have wanted for nothing and feared even less. We became the thing you feared above all else when we should have been your comfort in this multiverse." Nightmare broke off, feeling stupid for saying anything at all. It was obvious they weren't understanding, and they saw him as lesser. *Weaker.*

"I... saw."

Nightmare looked at Horror with confusion, seeing him staring intensely back at him. "When... you stopped rationing. Let... me start cooking. That... was you." He rumbled, to which Nightmare nodded dumbly in response.

"I saw you..." Nightmare snapped his head over to Dust now, who picked at the golden mittens on his hands. "I know you suspected Errata had started helping me, but you didn't say anything. You even provided me with an area to do my carvings. Not to mention all the times you've eased the... voices." He scanned Nightmare's face a moment with consideration. "You're the one who spared me when my levels started falling. That was you."

Nightmare breathed out a quiet sound at this, nodding as well. Killer cleared his throat, which *really* threw Nightmare. Killer would rather crawl through barbwire than admit to anything or be, Guardian's forbid, *sentimental.*

"Dammit, yeah, I saw you." Killer sighed as he shoved his hands into his pockets. "When you surrendered for my sake, even if we *both* knew you had a good chance to take them down. You did it because you didn't want to take the risk of me dying. You *told* me that, and you looked *shocked* when you said it. That's how I know you're both definitely different, somehow. And when you made me call Errata? That had to have taken a lot of pride swallowing to do, to admit someone else could do something for me that you couldn't." He huffed in amusement, much to Nightmare's momentary annoyance. "Yeah... that was you."

Nightmare glanced around at the bunch as they moved in closer, no longer appearing afraid or hesitant of his new form. Nightmare gave a confused sound as they surrounded him, momentarily alarming him. The sheer loyalty and respect that radiated from them baffled the spirit. How much they seemed to trust him despite their belief he was a different person was... touching. He gave a faint smile as the negativity retreated back to its proper place, sensing the group wasn't hostile. Nightmare allowed the tendrils to move and prod at each of them, seeming to take them in and commit them to memory.

"Yeah... that was me."

Chapter End Notes

Soft bois, anyone?

It's hard to write Nightmare's varying perspectives between himself and the combined being that is him and the negativity. It's a fun experiment since I very much see them as a symbiotic relationship. They FEEL like one being, so Nightmare only feels comfortable using We unless he's specifying himself.

Anyhow, lots of little things sprinkled in here to nudge a bit at the coming plot.

Chapter 30: Soul magic

Chapter Summary

Erratum decides to pay a visit to someone who could potentially assist them with their soul pieces.

Chapter Notes

Oh hello again. We're really picking up steam here now and I'm excited about it. I would like to reiterate that I DO have a sequel planned for this story and though I'm not solid on all the details, I do have a general plot in mind.

Anyhow, here's some more stuff to nourish your minds.

Enjoy

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Dream sighed heavily as the back of his head lightly met the large tree behind him. He was settled underneath the large apple tree of the Dreamscape, trying to psyche himself up enough to get started. It was always so *exhausting* to scour the unconscious minds of the multiverse and he typically didn't have the energy to make much of an impact. As much as positive, good dreams gave him power, the negative nightmares sapped it from him. Turning a bad dream into a positive one expended a lot of his own reserves, and with so much negativity in the multiverse, that usually ended in him losing more power than he got in return.

It was frustrating, but he had so much work to do. If he wanted to start properly correcting the emotional balance, he needed to start this arduous work as soon as he possibly could.

"You look like crap."

Dream blinked up at Nightmare's form, startled by his sudden appearance. Nightmare crouched down in front of him, grinning a bit at his surprised look. "What? Not happy to see your brother?" He taunted him, which seemed to snap the other out of his daze.

"Sorry, just, I haven't seen you in the Dreamscape since... you know." Dream muttered, brushing past it quickly. "What are you doing here though? Not that I'm not happy to see you, just...?"

Nightmare waved it off, not wanting to drag his past into this. "Well, I know you said you would handle things since you needed to spread positivity, but then that got me thinking." He started, whisps of purple magic following his hand as he spoke animatedly. "While I can't do much on my end, what I *can* do is help out here. Consuming bad dreams is still something in my arsenal of balance, after all." He smiled as he held his hand out to him. "Like old times, right?"

Dream stared down at his hand, flashes of memories passing through his eyes of when they would hop through the Dreamscape. They would have silly competitions to see if there were more good dreams or bad dreams, play tag throughout various unconscious minds, and of course, actually work! Nightmare or Dream would signal one another when coming across a particularly gruesome nightmare, or a mind that had been plagued with countless nights of nightmares, and begin their work. Nightmare would instantly consume the dream, fueling him in a quick burst of negativity, while Dream would expend minimal magic as a result to build a better dream world.

Changing a nightmare to a positive dream took a lot more energy than influencing a blank mind.

Dream moved to take the offered hand, smiling as he was pulled up to his feet. He nodded firmly in response and watched the subtle flash of relief flicker through his twin's face. He hoped to one day prove to

Nightmare that he still meant as much to him now as he did back then.

"Just like old times."

"Yeah, bruh. I dunno what to tell ya. I've never seen something quite like this before, bruh."

Erratum gave a soft sigh as they watched the small soul shards repel one another the moment they got too close together. They had hoped with Epic being Magic's champion, the other would have a bit more knowledge on this phenomenon. The champion appeared to be as puzzled as they were, sadly. "**Well, I appreciate you taking the time to offer your knowledge.**" The god sighed, disappointed that this had been another dead end. Epic gave them an apologetic look and shrugged a bit.

"Sorry, bruh. Magic is one thing, sure, but this is some freaky soul stuff. You'd think I'd know a thing or two about it but this is beyond even me, bruh." Epic apologized while Cross moved to pat his back.

"You did your best, dude." Cross assured sympathetically. "I don't get this soul magic stuff either so don't take it too hard."

Soul magic.

Erratum looked up from the little shards, intrigued by Cross's words. "**Soul magic...**" They hummed quietly, puzzling over where they had heard this before. They knew they had heard, or seen it somewhere else before, but where?

Then they recalled a neat little study; countless rows of old tomes and well-loved books tucked away with care.

Erratum fed the soul pieces back to Verse before getting to their feet again. Cross gave them a curious look, silently questioning where they were off to. "**I'm going to pay Nightmare a visit. I recall him having a few tomes and books on theoretics of souls and soul magic.**" They informed their champion, who still looked slightly uneasy despite their ongoing alliance with the darker spirit.

"All right... just be careful and actually *call us* if something happens. Not *after* it happens, *before.*" Cross emphasized with a narrowing of his eyes. Erratum held their hands up innocently at his accusing stare.

"**I will, I will. I have learned my lesson.**"

"Press 'x' to doubt." Epic chimed in from beside Cross, much to Erratum's confusion. Cross seemed amused, however.

"**I'll update you on anything, all right?**" Erratum promised as they opened a rift in front of themself. Cross gave them a hard look but nodded nonetheless. He knew the Guardian would go whether Cross believed them or not. "**Wonderful,**" Was all the god said before disappearing into the rift. They found themselves at the door of Nightmare's study once more, though no 'persuasion' was needed to get them here this time. They wasted no time giving a few gentle knocks on the door.

"Proceed."

Erratum assumed the other was admitting them access and opened the door. The office looked the same it had when they were last here a few days ago, though perhaps a bit messier. A few books were stacked up on either side of Nightmare's desk. The pile on the left seemed to have significantly more books than the pile on the right, and Erratum wondered which stack contained the ones the spirit had already read through. Said spirit hadn't acknowledged them too much, pouring through another book that lay open on his desk. The Guardian gave a few amused chuckles, pulling Nightmare's attention up to them.

"You're not who we were expecting," Nightmare spoke as he placed a finger against his book, probably keeping a place marker on the sentence he had been reading. "We hope you don't mind the lack of a proper greeting-"

"As I've told your brother, it's absolutely unnecessary, especially in polite company." Erratum quickly waved away. **"At any rate, I've come to ask about your knowledge of soul magic."** They informed, cutting right to the chase. Nightmare's brow bones rose in surprise at the other's words, moving to quickly mark his page before closing his book.

"Soul magic?" Nightmare repeated as he set the book down on the right side of his desk. He rose to his feet and scanned the other over with a perplexed expression. "Why would you be dabbling into the works of *soul magic?* That's a rather controversial branch of magic, after all." He informed them as he trailed his fingers over his bookshelf. "You better have a *very* good reason for-"

"What if I showed you something that you might find hard to believe?"

Nightmare gave a patient sigh as the other cut him off. He gave the god a rather dry look in response, as though he were questioning why he was even dealing with them at all. "Errata... you would have to be much more specific than that. You constantly are doing things that are hard to believe." He informed as he pulled a book from his shelf.

Erratum gave a quiet laugh at this. "**I can't exactly argue with that logic. At any rate, *this,***" They retrieved the various soul pieces from Verse once more, using a series of strings to keep them all from flying apart. The soul's repelling force toward each of its pieces made it impossible to have them all close in proximity without pushing each other away.

"**Is that something.**"

Nightmare dropped his book a moment, quickly moving in front of the god to view the little pieces. He appeared fascinated by them, a hand moving out to lightly glance over one of the pieces. "What...? How is this possible? How long have you had this??" He glanced up at them with confusion, though his curiosity was much more prominent than his annoyance.

"**I found it in my antivoid a while back, right where the creator was formed.**" Erratum watched as Nightmare stiffened up a bit at this implication. "**This is Ink's soul.**"

"Guardian's above and every star in the sky..." Nightmare muttered, both stunned and completely exasperated all at once. "So when you said his soul was basically shattered when he was created-"

"**I was literal, yes.**" Erratum nodded as they gave a soft sigh. "**I can't influence them to bind with one another again, however. It's almost like each bit has its own gravitational field that's pushing them away from each other.**" Erratum watched Nightmare select

two pieces, attempting to push them closer together. Nightmare's brow bone shot up again as the pieces halted abruptly, resisting hard enough to keep Nightmare from pushing them any further.

"Fascinating..." Nightmare breathed as he slowly pulled them away from each other again. "We've never studied soul shards up close as they normally disintegrate quickly after they shatter. This is an entirely new concept we're looking at here." He enthused as he pulled them closer to his face to view them.

It was slightly endearing, but it didn't answer any of Erratum's pressing questions.

"Is there anything you know of that could assist with them bonding back together? I've tried a few different methods to put these pieces together, but it's obvious that there's something I don't quite understand." Erratum had even resorted to attempting to stitch them together at one point. That had been disastrous.

"You speak of doing something a bit unethical here." Nightmare warned as he released the pieces from his hands, picking his tome up off the floor. "Most mages and magic users frown upon manipulating the soul. Does Reaper know you're doing this?"

"Well, no..." Erratum muttered, turning their head away a moment. **"It's a bit blurry as far as his domain goes. The soul isn't exactly dead and Ink is very much alive, so does it count?"** They shrugged, trying to appear unbothered.

"Mhmm," Nightmare hummed, looking unimpressed. "Do you suppose if he found these little pieces he could reap him?" He questioned.

"The Guardians wouldn't want that." Erratum felt certain of this

matter. "**Fate gave him an alternative source of life so he may continue to exist. If Reaper were to reap these... I'm not certain what would happen. I don't intend to find out.**" They watched as Nightmare shook his head and peered down at his book.

"So you turn to us to help with your immoral deeds."

"**Immoral is a strong word to use here.**" Erratum defended as they hovered closer to his desk. "**It's not bringing a soul back to life if the person in question is already alive, right?**"

Nightmare huffed out a quiet breath. "Oh, our mistake. Not immoral, just 'morally gray', right?"

"**Now you're on my level.**" Erratum smiled back at the other's taunting tone of voice. "**I won't tell anyone of your assistance if that's what you're concerned about.**" They added as Nightmare furrowed his brow bone in concentration.

"We have no image to uphold anymore. We don't think people can think lower of us and tampering with souls is just par for the course." Nightmare glanced up at Erratum, mildly amused at their confusion. "It's an expression. It would surprise no one to see us do it." He explained further before turning the book around and tapping the page.

Erratum glanced down at it, tilting their head a bit at the images and words. "**It might be faster for you to explain it. My first language is binary and I'm rather slow trying to translate.**" They frowned as Nightmare gave them a bizarre look before shaking his head a bit.

"Souls are held together by the culmination of a creature's magic. In theory, a strong enough magical force should be able to cause each

piece to recognize one another once more." Nightmare tapped his fingers on the desk, humming a bit as a dark tendril appeared from his back and tapped the page. "Yes, that's the issue." He spoke, frowning a bit. "The magical force most likely should be from the soul owner's own magic. We don't exactly have that though, do we?" He frowned as the tendril arched at him. "Look, we're good but we're not *miracle workers."*

"Are you talking to me or-?"

Nightmare batted away the tendril and rubbed his hands together. "Fine! We have high doubts that this will work, but we're already here and we're always up to prove someone wrong." Before Erratum could question if he was even speaking to them anymore, Nightmare's hands lit up with a bright violet colour. Each soul shard glimmered around its edges with the same violet, ensnared in the spirit's magic. "Okay, release them, and let's see what we can do." He instructed.

Erratum felt hesitant to do so, knowing how these volatile pieces could scatter apart. Slowly, each thread released their captured shard, allowing them to be held solely by Nightmare's magic. Nightmare gave a hum of approval as he moved his hand around, the pieces circling in the air for a moment. "Now let's see where each bit goes..." He muttered as they swarmed around him. Nightmare would move his hand and arrange several pieces at once, sifting some off to the side for later consideration. The tendril on his back would occasionally move to gesture at something and the spirit would respond back verbally to it.

The Guardian was captivated by him. They knew from seeing his large collection that Nightmare must have been quite the magic user at a younger age, but it was obvious his continued studies made up for the lack of practicals. Erratum would follow each wave of his hand as he maneuvered around the pieces and seemed to place them in a shape that resembled the upside-down heart structure. They could see the sweat beading on their skull as both hands moved to cup either side of this 'soul'.

"Son of a..." Nightmare grunted as his body strained, attempting to force these pieces together. "Come on, you're so *close!* Just accept each other, dammit!" He hissed as more purple magic flared from his left socket. He finally gave a strained shout and released his hold, panting heavily as the oddly shaped 'soul' hovered in front of him. He glanced over it, huffing a bit with interest. "Well... We did *something.*" He shrugged. "Definitely not a fix or compatible with life, but it's more than we thought." He glowered as the tendril beside him swayed a bit.

"It... almost looks normal." Erratum hummed as they cupped their hands under the object. **"Well, at the very least I don't have to worry about losing any of the pieces anymore. I'm grateful that you even attempted. I know you don't exactly like Ink."** They moved to carefully allow Verse to absorb the strange 'soul', watching Nightmare wipe his forehead and sigh.

"Yeah, well, you've done us a lot of favours. We don't like being in debt to others." Nightmare excused with a small frown. "Plus, it gave us an opportunity to experiment with something we couldn't possibly pass on." They hummed as they looked Erratum up and down a moment.

"It'll be something to speak to the other Guardians about." Erratum stated as Verse vanished from in front of them. Nightmare held his hand up at this, grabbing their attention once more.

"Let us do it." He requested, surprising Erratum. "We were going to request council in Reapertale for... our own reasons, so it's something we can add into our discussion with them." Nightmare assured, tendril curling up a bit. Erratum couldn't imagine what Nightmare had to discuss with any of the Guardians, simply chalking it up to lessons or guidance as a champion.

"All right, if you would prefer to do it that way, then so be it." Erratum nodded, much to Nightmare's delight. **"At any rate, I shall let you return to your studies."** They smirked the slightest bit as they said this, not bothering to exit through the door as they fell back into another golden rift.

Nightmare shook his head a bit as the other vanished, glowering a bit as the tendril rounded on him. "What? We didn't say anything." He defended, wincing as it lightly jabbed his forehead. "We don't have to listen to that." He huffed as he switched the book on his desk for the one he had been reading earlier. He coiled a whisp of magic around his fingers, manipulating it with subtle twitches of his hands. He glanced over them before huffing a small laugh, seeming to understand the god's amusement now.

"Maybe you were right. Maybe we did miss practicing complex magic. Nosy god..."

Ink had been perfectly content to the extent his paints allowed watching Dream ramble on about something while they were patrolling Haventale.

Well, patrolling was the word Dream used. Ink believed 'goofing off' was a better term.

Ink had been nodding dumbly, a lot of the information drifting out of his mind the moment it entered. He was more interested in watching Dream weave together daisy chains with enthusiasm to match his words.

Ah yes, definitely 'patrolling'.

Ink grinned a bit as he moved to make a comment on it, knowing the other would struggle for an excuse when confronted. He paused as the hollowness in his chest seemed to shrink and his ribs felt lighter. An explosion of sensations saturated his system, causing him to fall supine from where he had been sitting on the ground. His hand clutched his chest, eyelights fiercely changing every few seconds as he tried to process everything.

"Ink??" Dream gasped as he leaned over the other. He moved his hands to turn the artist's head side to side, seeming to appraise him for any issue. "What happened? What's wrong?" He fretted as the artist remained stunned on his back. Dream frowned as Ink looked up at him, seeing something akin to wonder pass over his features.

"Wow... you're really pretty, you know that?" Ink wasn't sure what possessed him to inform Dream of this humiliating information, but it was out in the open now. There was this *feeling* in his chest that he acted upon immediately, exploring the foreign sensation with verve. There were *many* unfamiliar... feelings? Emotions? That would be impossible, he didn't feel these things. Try as he might, mixing his paints could only accomplish so much. The delicate, more subtle feelings were never replicable despite his best efforts.

This felt like one of those feelings, however. Soft and delicate, like silk ribbons laced between his ribs.

"I-Ink! Don't tease me, you're obviously hurt!" Dream stuttered as he momentarily flushed a bright yellow colour. Ink could only laugh breathlessly at the reaction, feeling that sensation bubble around in him another moment before it all faded away again.

Cold, heavy, empty.

Then, a slight sensation. Something that was just *barely* there, if he focused hard enough.

Like a promise held just outside of his reach.

"Ink?" The artist blinked back up at Dream, his senses returning back from their overstimulated assault.

"Sorry! Not sure what that was all about, but I feel fine now." Ink assured as he sat up quickly, causing Dream to lean back more. "Anyway, you were saying? Something, something, Dreamscape..."

Dream huffed out a frustrated breath. "I can see you were paying as much attention as I thought you were. And please don't brush over this, Ink. You were acting so strange... are you sure you're okay?" He checked once more, though he had to admit the other appeared completely normal. Ink tilted his head a bit at him, taking in the lingering dusting of yellow on the spirit's cheeks and concern in his eyes. That soft, fluttering feeling was distantly sparked for a mere moment, but it was enough to make him smile.

"Yeah... yeah, no I'm good. I'm really good."

Chapter End Notes

LET ME EXPLAIN, SHH. SHH LET ME.

So that explosion moment for Ink was when Nightmare had the pieces as close as he could get them, jamming in magic and trying to force those bad boys back together. The lighter feelings he has for literally less than a second is due to how close together the pieces are held with magic. It's not enough to inspire really anything at all, but it's more of a brush against his mind that just as quickly leaves.

Ink is still very much reliant on his vials, but if he can focus on it, there are occasions there's an echo of a feeling far, far out of his reach.

Chapter 31: Interwoven

Chapter Summary

Erratum has to play negotiator for another world to prevent further conflict.

Later on, they find themselves having an interesting time at Nightmare's manor.

Chapter Notes

Once again, Dev is here.

I've really been testing myself by writing so many damn stories back-to-back but, again, it's my only coping mechanism and has kept me from completely breaking down as of lately.

Anyhow! Now for something... interesting?

Enjoy

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Geno didn't think he would have to deal with troublesome neighbors when he had decided to live within Erratum's plane. Sure he knew Fresh would pop in and out to annoy all of them, but nothing could have compared to what was residing just a stone's throw away.

"Hoi! New neighbor!" Geno cringed as the small creature rested its front paws on his leg. Sure the little Temmie they had helped nurse back to health was manageable, but he hadn't realized that it had *multiplied* so much! "Tem... hap! Skeletons... kyoot!"

Reaper seemed endeared, and perhaps equally amused by Geno's reluctance. Either way, he didn't seem to mind the 'village' being about a mile from their home. He had assured Geno that Erratum would make their home secure so none of them could squeeze in.

Erratum had confirmed Reaper's claim and Geno felt just a tad more relaxed by the reassurance.

They had decided to go with a more rustic home to fit the rather overgrown and wilderness theme of their world. Erratum had spent a few days with Geno over their shoulder, pointing out things on Verse as they constructed the base blueprint. They had agreed upon a log cabin structured home, which suited Geno's want for something simplistic and cozy. He had also attempted to explain the various amenities a home needed for them to live in, which had originally confused the god. Geno was perplexed on how Erratum could have such vast knowledge of the multiverse and how to manipulate it, yet absolutely no fathomable idea what a sink was.

"And this is for..."

"Washing things? You know, like dishes? Your hands even?" Geno would have thought the other was messing with him if it weren't for the genuine confusion they had shown.

"Is that not what a stream is for?"

"Errata... I'm not coming outside and walking all the way over the bridge every time I need to wash my clothes or dishes."

Despite how long it had taken to actually design a liveable home, it had taken only a few hours to construct. Geno watched with fascination as Erratum simply manipulated the environment with the help of their various consoles and even directly manipulated code in front of him. Geno had done a throughout inspection afterward, making sure the place was structurally stable considering how fast it had been made. It seemed satisfactory, however, and he had little to complain about.

"I'll admit, that's pretty impressive," Geno spoke as he stood back and admired the cozy little home. "Though I wasn't expecting it to be done quite *that* soon. I don't have any of my stuff packed..." He chuckled as he looked at Erratum.

"It's easy when you've lived here for thousands of years. I know how to change this environment at will and reconstruct it as I wish." Erratum explained, sensing his curiosity.

"If that's the case, why don't you do that for other worlds? You know, reshape them and all that?" Geno questioned with a slight frown. It certainly would have served to make things easier on a lot of worlds.

"I'm no creator, Geno. I cannot simply rewrite a story and tamper with the universes." Erratum sighed as they frowned. **"I am bound not only by certain laws but also by what domains I reside in. While my plane of existence is easy for me to manipulate due to its lack of story, time, and being outside of the multiverse, other worlds don't fit those very specific quotas."**

"That's dumb. So Ink is who we have to rely on to fix everything?" Geno wrinkled the bridge of his nose at the idea.

"Not really,"

Both Erratum and Geno glanced over at the new voice, the god smiling warmly while Geno prickled visibly. Nightmare nodded a greeting to both of them, trying to ignore Geno's obvious irritation at his appearance.

"Ink is Fate's champion, and as such, has the ability to decide what

comes into existence and what doesn't. Once he creates the world, it is very difficult to change its route, and certainly not without... consequences." Nightmare frowned as he touched his face a moment, causing Geno to lessen his hostility a bit. "Ink simply isn't powerful enough to wipe the slate clean and start over, or pick pieces to edit without destabilizing the world. For now, there isn't too much to be done with a completed timeline."

"Well put, and accurate." Erratum nodded in agreement at his words. **"I do believe, however, that if we were to experiment with our abilities together, we could perhaps find safer ways to explore the possibility of 'editing' a world."** They shrugged a bit as they said it, however, as it seemed not even plausible that Ink would ever agree to that.

"We're sure he'd just love to rub shoulders with you." Nightmare huffed softly, earning a soft hum of agreement from the god.

Erratum glanced upward a moment with a frown, sighing softly as they gave Nightmare an apologetic look. **"I know you've just arrived, but there's apparently an issue I must attend to."** They informed him, to which the spirit waved off easily.

"It's fine. We were going to speak with your champions, however, if you'd mind not calling for them for just a little bit." Nightmare informed the curious god. "And uh, perhaps you as well Geno." Nightmare included after a moment of thought. Erratum glanced between them with lingering curiosity but said nothing as they opened a rift.

"All right... feel free to stay as long as you'd like. I'll try to return as soon as I can." Erratum gave them both a slight wave before disappearing into the opened rift. They were quickly greeted with an interesting scene in the wake of New Home. They rose a curious brow bone as Undyne approached them, face set in a hard scowl as she looked them up and down.

"Yeah, you'll do." She voiced after a moment, further puzzling the god. "Got a couple of extradimensional freaks poking around. Sans said to call out your name and the current pressing issue if anyone suspicious showed up." Undyne explained as she kept a tight grip on her spear.

"Have you gotten a look at who these suspicious persons are?" Erratum questioned the captain.

Undyne glowered at them a moment as if to judge how incompetent they were. "Would I have called you here if not?" She hissed at them. "I thought they were Sans at first, but then there were more?? That looked like Sans?? I thought I was hallucinating from the heat of Hotland, but I definitely saw a bunch of rogue skeletons. One had a giant... paintbrush? On their back?" She seemed completely befuddled as she explained it. "There was another, kinda taller skeleton. Not quite... *you* tall. Shit man." She scoffed as she looked up at them. "Had some cracks down his face. Then there was one other guy that I saw. Had a dumb little crown and a cape."

Erratum hummed softly and nodded. **"Understood; I know who these monsters are. I assume they're further up ahead, so I will-"** They jolted a bit as a spear suddenly struck the ground in front of them, momentarily startling them. They looked back at Undyne, who was sneering at them again with outrage.

"SLOW DOWN!" She snapped at them abruptly. "Sans said you were some kind of higher being! I am the captain of the Royal Guard and I will *escort you* to them." She spoke firmly as another spear appeared in her hand. Erratum held up their hands in surrender, not willing to start an argument with her. Undyne seemed satisfied with their compliance, quickly stalking ahead while Erratum followed behind with a soft sigh.

Why did they need an escort again? They were more than capable of

defending themselves in an emergency.

Undyne led them through the abandoned home of the Dreemurrs and down the stairs, escorting them the entire way to the judgment hall. The Guardian was slightly annoyed, as it would have been *much* faster for them to have simply pixelated their way over. They weren't about to say this though and wind up with a spear in their eye socket; they already had sight issues, thank you.

Finally, Erratum was led into the large hall where, just up ahead, they could see a group of familiar skeletons. They took a slow breath and released it, trying to keep themselves composed for the nonsense they were most likely walking into. Undyne's heeled boots clicked and echoed through the hall while Erratum moved silently behind her, gathering the attention of all parties ahead.

"Bout time," Red grunted as Undyne fell in line beside Erratum, still keeping the fierce guard demeanor up. "Can you tell these lot to fuck off now? I already told 'em we ain't on their side so they're not welcome here." He glowered at the group, which only earned a glare back from Ink.

"You can't bar us from this universe! We're just doing check-ins to see what's going on!" Ink protested with irritation.

"I already told you that I'm leavin' my world in *their* hands!" Red snapped as he gestured to Erratum, who looked far too uncomfortable to be part of the conflict. "So piss off! And yeah, you sure look like you're only 'checking in' with that guy with ya." He glared at the taller skeleton from Echotale, as Erratum recognized, who looked more collected than the rest of them.

"I wouldn't have to bring other people along for backup if you all weren't so hostile!" Ink protested as he glanced at Erratum. "Is this

what you wanted? This ridiculous conflict between worlds?!" He snapped at the god.

"Me? I didn't start this!" Erratum denied with a tight frown. **"The *last* thing I want is for others to be fighting on my behalf! I didn't even start this war; I was never even asked if this was what I wanted, which in case you have not realized, it *isn't."*** Erratum had to take a moment to breathe again, trying to keep themselves from becoming angry. **"This issue is between you and me, Ink. No one else. Just call off your people, and by that I mean stop closing off worlds to others!"**

"Your side is doing the same thing!"

"There is no *my side,* Ink! They only did it in retaliation to Sci barring them from entry! I can only do so much before the others begin acting of their own volition from an injustice. I hold meetings *constantly* to try and remind them all not to engage." They glanced over to Red a moment, who shrugged.

"Didn't do nothin' this time, did I? I called for ya before attacking." Red pointed out, though it did very little to soothe the god's irritation.

"Regardless, if the residences don't want you here, then you need to leave." Erratum sighed as Ink tightened his grip on his brush. **"Please don't make this difficult. I truly don't want to fight you."** They turned their eyes to Dream, who was looking everywhere else but at the god. **"Dream, I expect you to know when to back off. Any sort of monitoring in this world is done by *me,* therefore, I can ensure you it is well looked after."**

Dream opened his mouth to speak, but Ink held his arm out in front of Dream. "Don't intimidate him like that!" The artist growled with a red flash in his eyes.

"I'm not intimid-"

"We're not gonna surrender and leave just because you think you own this world." Ink snapped, much to Erratum's annoyance.

"I might." G spoke from beside Ink, leaning against one of the cracked pillars and texting on his phone.

"No, you won't!" Ink protested the other's aloft response, looking annoyed as he watched the taller skeleton ignore the entire encounter.

"Can I also emphasize that I *don't* believe I own this world? I just look after it and answer those who call out to me?" Erratum chimed in, wanting to get that out in the open even if Ink continued to distrust them.

"Ink," Dream sighed as he grabbed the other's arm that was still outstretched in front of him. "Look, we can see this world's obviously fine and... well, Errata *has* done a good job keeping this place safe. I mean... no one even directly attacked us on sight! That's something, right?" He grinned weakly, hoping the other would just give up on attempting to provoke a fight.

"Dream, who's side are you on?!" Ink protested at his words, giving him a confused and slightly aggravated expression. Dream sighed as he grasped Ink's hand, which appeared to startle the artist. Dream pulled together his gentlest, perhaps manipulatively so, expression as he faced him.

"Yours, Ink."

Ink stared at him a moment, caught off guard by the direct response. His eyelights shifted rapidly a moment between shapes, appearing confused about what to settle on. That distant flutter was back and he managed to pull his gaze away to glare back at Erratum. "Fine... we'll leave. Don't think this means you've won, though."

"**No one wins in a situation like this.**" Erratum sighed as Dream quickly opened a new portal behind the three of them. "**I don't want this to be a war, Ink. *Please,* tell your people to lay down their arms and we can-**"

"Nope! Don't wanna hear it!" Ink cut them off before they could get their entire thought out. "Don't expect me to be so merciful next time!" He shouted before the three of them disappeared. Erratum's shoulders slumped a bit at this as they sighed.

"Wow," Undyne spoke up with a judgmental look. "Thought you said this guy was supposed to be some powerful god?" She laughed at the idea. "Oh, I'm terrified! They might rationalize me to death!" She mocked. Red looked uneasy, sweating a bit as he glanced at Erratum.

The Guardian laughed a bit at this before their face fell flat. Their eyes lit up a bright golden colour and their mana lines pulsed. "**I'm not certain you want to test me after that frustrating encounter.**" They warned as magic weighed heavily down on them both.

"Okay, okay! Fuck, my bad!" Undyne immediately backtracked at the obvious threat to her being. "Damn, okay, I see it now." She grumbled as the god reigned themselves back in.

Erratum could only chuckle again at the change of heart.

Erratum had been thinking about Nightmare lately.

After the confrontation in Underfell, they had a suspicion that Dream hadn't mentioned anything about Nightmare to Ink. Knowing Nightmare was still out traveling universes when he could, though only select ones that Erratum had fully ensured understood his predicament, it could spell disaster in the future. If Ink happened upon him, despite his new appearance, Erratum was afraid the other would immediately react with hostility.

Erratum had pondered over this situation for a while, knowing the dark spirit may be reluctant to call them in a tough situation. It was a few days later when they were mending Cross's scarf that the god had an epiphany. From there, they began to work with their strings. They tried to work with both haste to get it to Nightmare quickly, and gentleness to ensure it was as well-crafted as they could make it.

Once they had finally finished, they appeared at Nightmare's study once more with a few soft knocks.

"Enter, Errata."

The god hummed with surprise, opening the door and entering his office. Nightmare was sitting in an armchair near his bookshelf, looking slightly amused at the god's intrigued expression.

"How did you know it was me?" Erratum questioned curiously as Nightmare turned to face them better.

"You always knock the exact same way. The boys feel the need to pound on the door to get our attention." Nightmare explained with a small huff of a laugh. He glanced up again as Erratum moved to settle beside him in the opposite chair. "We never got a chance to speak about it, but the Guardians gave us some insight on the soul situation." He informed, instantly capturing the other's attention. "It seems we were right about a lot of it, but perhaps, the other Guardians could assist if they were able to see it."

"That poses a problem..."

Nightmare sighed with a small nod. "We know, and we said the same. Astral projection is one thing, but you can't bring your physical possessions with you. We haven't thought of anything so far that could potentially assist in this." He admitted with a small frown, one tendril curling on his back in thought while the other was busy prodding at the god's hand. Erratum hummed as they lightly touched the tendril, jarring Nightmare out of his thoughts.

"I'm glad they don't melt as they used to when I touched them. I think it was an effect of Karma, which I assume was broken when we shot straight magic through your soul." Erratum remarked as the tendril snaked around their arm a moment in response to the prodding.

"Sorry they're so... active. We, well, *I,* can't really control them." Nightmare spoke as he tapped the clean side of his skull. The Guardian gave an amused sound as they glanced back at Nightmare again.

"I don't mind them. At any rate, I didn't come here for an update,

though it is very much appreciated." Erratum informed as they turned to Nightmare. The spirit hummed in confusion but nodded his head for them to continue. Erratum moved their hand to retrieve something from within their robe, struggling a moment with the tendril tugging their arm a bit. They did snicker to themselves, however, as they listened to Nightmare chastise the appendage in an embarrassed hiss.

When Erratum finally presented the item for him to see, Nightmare froze.

It appeared to be a bracelet of some sort, woven in a complex design from the god's golden strings. Even without holding it, Nightmare could feel the powerful pulses of magic coming off of it in waves. He looked up at Erratum, mouth slightly opened as he tried to find words.

The Guardian appeared confused by his reaction but decided to put it aside a moment to explain. "**I know you can be rather proud, and I worry that if you ever find yourself in need of me, you won't call for me. I made this from my own magic for you to wear, which I hope you will, so I can make sure you can reach me when you need me. If you should ever find yourself in need, simply grasp the threads and pull. I will be able to sense it.**" They informed him. "**In a way, it will ensure I'm always with you.**"

Nightmare continued to stare at this presented item for a moment, nodding slowly to assure he was listening to them. Finally, he moved his arm forward and presented his hand to them silently. Erratum tilted their head a bit at the gesture. They weren't sure why the other didn't simply take the item, but perhaps he simply needed help putting it on? The god didn't ask as they leaned in and fastened it just below where his glove started. Erratum smiled a bit at the bright gold that stood out from the other's darker colours.

Nightmare moved their opposite hand to run a hand over the threads, seeming to admire it. The god gave a soft hum, faintly sensing the

delicate touch through their magic. "It's... very beautiful." He finally managed after another moment. He blinked a few times to break out of the trance, suddenly frowning. "Wait, hold on, this isn't how-" He seemed slightly irritated by something, getting to his feet quickly and pulling open a drawer on his desk. "We went through all this trouble, *we're* supposed to do this!" He declared, though Erratum had absolutely no idea what he was referring to.

The spirit finally grabbed something, making a noise of satisfaction before he was in front of Erratum again. He was suddenly holding out an old tome to the god, which Erratum could only guess was at least a couple of centuries old from how worn it looked. The god looked up at Nightmare, watching as he gave them a serious expression while their tendrils swayed behind him. The god finally took the book after a moment, running their hand over the cover with interest.

"This was the very first tome we ever owned." Nightmare spoke as Erratum studied the thick leather cover. "We didn't have a lot back then, and anything we had of value was usually destroyed or stolen from us. We kept this book stored away inside the hollow of the tree. It was, and really still is, our most prized possession." He explained with an intense look that the god felt pinned under.

"Errata... I-"

The spirit was cut off as a loud thumping against the door interrupted his speech. His tendrils immediately sharpened and reared back with hostility at the interruption, Nightmare's entire body language becoming aggressive as Dust entered his study without being authorized. Dust momentarily glanced between the two of them, seeming confused before shaking his head and looking at Nightmare.

"Killer's having a really bad magic storm."

Erratum stood immediately at this, keeping the book held firm in their hands. Nightmare appeared alarmed by this, his tendrils twisting with anxiety.

"We didn't think he could get those, he's never had an issue before!" Nightmare glanced at Erratum for a moment with a pleading expression. "We know it's a lot to spring on you, but..."

Erratum shook their head a bit at his apologetic tone. "**This is one thing I know I can handle. Please, take me to him.**" They insisted, following after Dust as he silently left Nightmare's study. Both the god and spirit followed Dust all the way to the designated training room, where Killer was lying on his back with a large puddle of black liquid around his head.

"This is bad... he's burning up." Nightmare spoke as he crouched beside Killer, wincing at the harsh lashes of magic that battered against his bones. "Why is this happening *now?* After all of this time?" He glanced up at Erratum as they knelt down and withdrew Killer's soul.

"Because," Erratum spoke as the soul was engulfed in a sphere of golden light. "**His soul is different now. Before I repaired it and placed it back where it was supposed to be, its composition was much different. You're the expert on souls here, but whatever influence on his soul seemed to work like a magical sponge. He just kept soaking up magic and never capped off on levels as everyone else did. Now it's all hitting him at once.**"

Nightmare glanced down at Killer as they spoke, tilting his head to the side to help his sockets drain a bit easier. One tendril was patting the back of his head, as though trying to offer its own support. "It makes as much sense as everything else, we guess. The soul is still a complex and vaguely understood concept. Whatever kept Killer's soul in its perpetual state before, it's obvious it isn't working for him now." He felt a pang of sympathy for the normally mischievous monster

writhing on the floor.

Erratum nodded a bit, mana lines glowing as they continued to feed magic into the little sphere. "**My worry is what comes now. With Dust's levels having dropped, magic storms aren't an issue. At least not to the extreme they were before. Horror's only came due to the sudden influx of magic, which should have stabilized by now. Killer isn't losing levels anytime soon, and I'm certain he's *far* above the point he should have capped.**"

"Are you suggesting this could become a regular thing?" Nightmare was concerned by this implication. He didn't want Killer to have to deal with such a crippling, disabling issue that could come on at any moment. "There has to be *something* we can do."

"**I don't have any ideas sadly.**" Erratum muttered, sweat beginning to run down the side of their skull. "**You're the one with all the magic knowledge. I bet you could think of something.**" They encouraged, trying to keep their focus on the ball of magic.

Nightmare didn't say anything to this, simply remaining silent and at Killer's side while Erratum worked. It took several more minutes of work, but finally, the other's body cooled and the magic had stopped prickling against the both of them. Erratum sighed shakily as they released the soul, allowing it to return back to Killer's chest. Nightmare breathed a quiet breath of relief as Killer groaned and twitched, but the thick liquid had stopped pouring from his sockets.

"**If this happens again, let me know. Maybe if I can get here the moment it begins to build, I can stop it quicker.**" Erratum panted softly, wiping at their skull with the back of their robe sleeve. "**I don't mean to cut this short, but I need to return and rest after all of this. It takes quite a bit out of me.**" They informed Nightmare. They could tell the other seemed discouraged for some reason, but he nodded in understanding. Erratum gave a weak smile as they pulled out the book from where they had stashed it within their robes.

"Some of this stuff might go over my head, but I'm sure I'll enjoy looking through it." They assured, seeing the other perk back up the slightest bit.

"We know you'll find *something* in there worthwhile." Nightmare assured as the other managed to open a new rift back to their plane. "Don't be a stranger. Your visits don't have to be solely business based; we still have to beat you in chess." He informed them.

Erratum gave an amused laugh as they stepped through the portal. **"I look forward to you trying."** They replied before closing the rift off. The god huffed out an exhausted breath as they immediately moved to sink against their altar. They felt so weary after draining their magic like that, but it had been worth it to keep Killer from burning out his soul.

"That's quite a big sigh." Erratum opened one eye as Dream leaned over them. "I was wondering where you had disappeared to! I told you I'd be by to discuss what's been going happening on Ink's side of the conflict. Well, at least what I've managed to-" He broke off a moment, staring down at the book settled in Erratum's lap. "Is that...? That's Nightmare's little book! He always had his nose buried in that when we were kids. I can't believe he would part with it!" He spoke with shock.

"He was very strange about presenting it to me." Erratum admitted with a soft hum. **"Then again, he was a little strange when I gave him the bracelet."**

"What bracelet?" Dream questioned with curiosity.

"I wove together a bracelet for him with my magic so he could call for me. It allows me to sense his distress if he pulls on it."

"So..." Dream spoke slowly, staring at them with wide eyes. "You... marked him? With your magic?" Erratum frowned at the phrasing, as it seemed to mean something to Dream. "You're telling me you gave him something that put *your* magical signature on *him,* correct?"

"I... yes? I suppose that's what that would constitute as?" Erratum frowned as Dream suddenly grabbed the book from them. The spirit opened the cover and a shiny silver object fell from the open book. Erratum retrieved the item from the ground, admiring it a moment. It appeared to be a robe clasp in the shape of a crescent moon, the metal a delicate silver colour with a dark amethyst stone settled near the base.

Dream's eyelights seemed to shift to stars as he stared down at it while Erratum ran their thumb over the clasp. "Oh... ohhh Nighty... and you had the nerve to make comments about *me.*" He sighed as he rested his hand on his cheek, watching the god with a heavy sigh. "Gosh, I'm gonna make fun of you." He grinned as he thought of how Nightmare must have reacted to all of this.

"What was that?"

"Nothing! I'm just... you know what? We can talk later. You look tired, get some rest!" Dream insisted with a small wave, disappearing before Erratum could even question him.

The god was perplexed at how odd *both* twins were. They had both behaved rather strangely that day and Erratum had no way of determining why that was. Their eyes trailed down to the shiny silver piece in their hand, which brought a small smile to their face. They supposed it didn't really matter at the moment, and they *were* rather tired now. Erratum moved to attach the clasp on their robe, just below where their hood connected at the neck.

They were probably overthinking everything again anyway.

Chapter End Notes

This... became WAY longer than it was supposed to be. It was imperative for me to get these scenes out here though so, OH WELL.

Anyway, yeah! Something interesting.

Chapter 32: Vivid and Blank

Chapter Summary

Dream sneakily helps Erratum 'take a break' from their obsessive work. While Erratum has a moment of reprieve, Dream is left to deal with something much more sinister.

Chapter Notes

Okay, I have written the courting steps since I kept meaning to explain them:
1. Ask for blessing from family
2. Present first gift with declaration of intent
3. Marking of prominent feature(s) on body in a symbolic colour of courtee
4. The two beings spar to display their power
5. Introduction of courtee to prominent family, and in cases of a deity with a non-deity courtee, introduction of courtee to prominent deity beings that relate to their domain.
6. Courtee is taken to a place of importance/significance to the courter. (Basically like a date)
7. Courter wears an important article of clothing belonging to the courtee to show equal ownership.
8. Both parties settle into a shared home to prepare for their lives together.
9. Courter and Courtee mark each other with their magic
10. Courter officially asks courtee to be their soulmate

Then soulbonding ceremony

Soulbonding ceremony is a celebration of the coming union. The ceremony has become the equivalent to a wedding to declare the two officially soulmated, married, ect.
Bonding of the souls is a private matter done in the privacy and at the discretion of the soulmates. (It is purely a magic exchange. It's not like... lewd? Lmao I don't know how else to explain.)

ANYHOW!

Enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Dream arrived back in Erratum's plane of existence with a bag in his hand and a rather pleased smile. He had spent the last hour or so setting a few things up to lure the overworked god out of their home and, personally, he believes he's done an excellent job thus far. The difficult part would be convincing Erratum to let Dream do what he had planned for them, but he was certain the other would cave with some insistence.

He sighed to himself as he spotted the god, still sitting in the same position with several windows opened. That strange 'soul' was hovering in front of them and was the focus of their latest binge. When Erratum had first revealed it to be Ink's shattered soul, the spirit had nearly collapsed under the weight of his own shock. Apparently, Erratum and Nightmare had worked to pull the shard pieces into a somewhat soul-shaped form, though it didn't appear even remotely stable. Dream was impressed to hear how skilled his brother was with his magical control, brushing aside the whole 'manipulating a soul' issue. Dream could agree that their attempts were absolutely called for and passed no judgment upon them.

Now, Erratum had been sitting in their garden for a few days, obsessively running check after check over this 'soul' and attempting to push the pieces even an inch closer to each other. Dream could tell it was taking a toll on their mind, as they constantly heard them muttering strange things to themselves. The most alarming one Dream had heard so far was along the lines of, "we could use this," and the spirit couldn't help but feel chilled by it even now.

Erratum glanced up briefly as Dream approached, giving a hum of acknowledgment before glancing back to the 'soul' in front of them. The spirit frowned sharply at them before settling beside them and grinning once more. Erratum could sense his eagerness and anticipation battering against their person, causing them to sigh and finally give Dream their attention.

"Did you need something?"

Dream nodded quickly as they sat up on their knees. "Yes! You've been sitting here for way too long and I think you need a break." He stated firmly. He watched the god give a tired sigh, but he wasn't about to let them dismiss his concerns. "So!" The spirit continued as he sat his bag down with a smile. "I decided to use you as a canvas if you're going to just be sitting here!" He decreed, much to the other's confusion.

"I'm sorry?" Erratum watched as Dream withdrew a mortar and pestle and a few various items. The spirit uncorked a vial of powder and dumped it in the little bowl before adding in what appeared to be a few berries. **"What are you doing? I would like to know before you start volunteering me for your activities."** They questioned with a hesitant look.

"Well, during a solo mission to negotiate with Outer, I picked up a few things! Outertale has these fragments of meteorites that have this ethereal glow to them when ground up. I figured mixing them in with pulp from some of the local berries would make a really pretty colour!" He informed them proudly. "I also have a really nice colour I already made as an experiment, so I figured you'd be perfect to try some complex designs on!" Dream beamed up at them.

Erratum gave him a strange look before huffing out an amused sound. **"Are you practicing your creative skills to impress Ink?"** They couldn't help but laugh at the immediate flustered expression it provoked from the spirit.

"No! Come on, don't tease me!" Dream protested at the other's clear amusement. "Okay, now you *have* to let me practice on you! I'll tell Nighty you're being mean to me!" He threatened them, though the Guardian didn't appear too phased by this claim. Still, they sighed and turned themselves a bit to face him.

"**I'm certain he would join me in tormenting you.**" Erratum replied with ease, laughing softly at Dream's pout. "**All right, I won't tease. Just don't smear it on my glasses.**" Erratum instructed, though moments after they stated this, they removed the spectacles altogether. Their eyesight was improving nicely from what it had once been, but they still would prefer their glasses while they were still damaged. "**There, now I don't have to worry about it. Just... not in the eyes. I've already had unpleasant experiences with paint in the eyes.**"

Dream winced at the reminder before nodding. "Don't worry, I'll just go around them. I'm just... highlighting your features!" He assured.

Erratum felt as though they were supposed to draw something from that comment, but they simply shrugged it off and let the other work. They continued to read the lines of coding that Verse displayed, occasionally tilting their head toward Dream to allow him to smear the cool paste against their face and cervical spine. They began to give him strange looks as he pushed the sleeves of their robes up a bit and began tracing over the mana lines with the substance.

"**I want you to know that this is exceptionally odd.**" Erratum informed as they examined their hand, which now held a bright and shimmery purple colour on the bones. "**What could you possibly be practicing for? I'm still slightly suspicious.**" They could see the small grin on Dream's face and knew they had every right to continue that suspicion.

"Oh, come on! When will I ever get the chance to practice on someone with your kind of colours? Now shush! Canvases don't speak!"

Erratum wasn't sure how long they sat there and allowed Dream to smear paint on them, but it was long enough for the Guardian to give up their studying and fully face Dream. The other had appeared pleased by this and continued their hard work.

"Aaaand... done!" Dream grinned, pulling his ungloved hands back and admiring his work. If his hands weren't covered in purple and teal paint he'd pat himself on the back for a job well done. The Guardian looked exotic with the mixture of colours on them, and that was just in the daylight!

"Do I look ridiculous?" Erratum questioned dully as they eyed the spirit suspiciously.

"Nope! I think it looks great." Dream insisted at the other's doubt. He frowned as Verse popped back into existence, gaining Erratum's attention again immediately. "You know what? If you're going to be obsessively working on this 'soul' issue, can you at least consult Nightmare? You're muttering is... starting to get creepy." He admitted with a slight shudder. "Maybe if you have someone to talk to and bounce ideas off of, you'll go less... stir crazy."

Erratum gave him an apologetic look at this. **"I don't mean to make you uncomfortable. I'm not even aware I'm doing it most of the time."** They wondered what they must have been saying for Dream to look so discomforted. **"Would it make you feel better if I at least consulted him?"**

"Yes! You should go now!" Dream insisted enthusiastically, startling the Guardian a moment.

"Now? Isn't it the middle of the night in Dreamtale?"

"Errata," Dream scoffed at the statement. "Nightmare excels during the later hours. If you're going to catch him sleeping, you're more likely to find him passed out mid-morning." He assured them at their hesitation. "Maybe you two can tire each other out through your

complicated magic discussions." He rolled his eyes a bit at this, imagining how dull those conversations must be.

Erratum sighed heavily as their screen disappeared. "**Fine, since you are so insistent.**"

"I am!" Dream nodded firmly as he rubbed his stained hands together.

Nightmare was anxiously standing in what he once considered his throne room. He could barely look at the dark throne now, however, as it just appeared gaudy. He couldn't believe he ever had such a dramatic piece made to sit on. Their corrupted side sure had quite the ego on them. He wasn't here to gaze upon his throne and berate himself, however. It seemed like a better area to meet with the Guardian that was still private enough to keep the others away. As much as he appreciated his boys, another mood killer like last time might cause Nightmare to partake in some actions he'd later regret.

He perked up a bit as he heard Dream's soft voice within his mind, alerting him to the other's imminent arrival. His anxiety only ramped up, tendrils coiling a bit as he took a few steady breaths. He hadn't seen what Dream had done, and he certainly wasn't looking in the mirror to check, so he had to just Hope that he didn't look ridiculous. When he turned to face the bright portal his brother must have made, he froze. The Guardian stumbled through with the 'encouraging' push from Dream before the portal closed.

Nightmare had no words to express his complicated emotions.

Erratum didn't appear to be wearing their glasses, probably to avoid getting any paint on them. The right side of their face had bright, teal colours tracing down the golden lines and around their eye. The right side of their Karma symbol was outlined in teal paint, while the other side was a shimmering shade of purple. The same pattern traced the other side of their face but in that shimmery purple colour. Both colours stretched down their cervical vertebrae, meeting together at the front. Nightmare could see even their hands had been traced in the colours chosen, which only served to prove the other wasn't just appealing to *Nightmare,* but to both sides of him. The corrupted and the uncorrupted; both of their colours lit up the Guardian before him.

And it *glowed.* It appeared to illuminate under the darkened conditions and light up their entire face.

He had not been prepared for this. This wasn't how this was supposed to go.

Erratum was having similar thoughts as they took in the obviously flustered spirit.

Nightmare had bright golden markings on either edge of their sockets, tracing downward in a familiar fashion. There were speckles of gold splashed on the darker, corrupted side of his face, looking like stars against a night sky. Four floating orbs of golden light were hovering nearby, illuminating the other in dim light. Even the summoned tendrils had golden lines wrapping around them. The entire visage of Nightmare was... entirely captivating.

Somewhere in the back of their mind, Erratum felt this was a very significant moment. They weren't sure why, but they knew it was something rather special.

"Hi," Nightmare spoke quietly, giving a sheepish grin. "We... um," He

breathed out a flustered laugh. "Sorry, you surprised us. We didn't know you'd be, um..." He couldn't get the words out, far too embarrassed to even try. Erratum had yet to say anything to him, and their piercing stare was beginning to make Nightmare lose his nerve.

Finally, the god approached him. Nightmare stiffened a bit as they did, staring up at them timidly. Erratum's hand came down to tilt the other's head up slightly, turning it either way gently. Nightmare only flushed brighter at this, cursing the other for remaining so calm in demeanor even at this moment.

"That's a very lovely colour on you."

That sentence alone made the tendrils on his back twist and braid themselves together. It was *entirely* unfair how smooth that was.

"Well... you're not looking that bad yourself." Nightmare managed lamely, to which the god blinked in surprise. Nightmare breathed a laugh as he motioned the other to follow him. He led them over to an expansive mirror on the wall near his throne. The spirit cupped his hand beside his eye, as though trying to hide his line of sight, as he gestured to the mirror.

Erratum stared at their image a moment, startled by how vibrant they looked with Dream's intricate designs. They stared at Nightmare's reflection as well, a small frown finding its way on their face as they noticed the other avoided the reflection by blocking his own peripheral. That was something to revisit at a different time, however.

Erratum turned away to look back at Nightmare, who seemed distracted tracing some of the lines of paint with his eyes. Nightmare seemed to notice he was staring, clearing his throat and straightening up a bit. "So, what did you need from us? We assume you have questions or something to discuss?" He prompted. Erratum continued

to stare a moment at him, finding themselves also tracing a few lines of paint with their eyes.

"I... you know, I can't quite remember."

Dream had felt pretty smug after seeing the brief stunned look on his brother's face before the portal closed. He had been rather proud of the face paint work he'd done on both of them, and if he carried an even more positive aura than normal, that was his own business. Reaper had made a comment on it when Dream used the sink in their new home to wash his hands. Dream hadn't revealed anything he was doing to the couple, but Geno looked as though he were aware of his shenanigans. He didn't appear happy, but one quick comment about the new little magical mark on his neck made Geno wrap his scarf tighter around him and hurry out of the room.

Dream left Erratum's plane, satisfied with his work, and appeared back at his little home hideout with Ink. He was humming contently to himself as he opened the front door, locking it behind him. "Ink! I'm-"

The spirit paused as he saw the artist on the living room floor. He was hunched over and grasping the sides of his head, hands trembling where they gripped.

Dream was on the ground beside him immediately, one hand gripping his arm while the other rested on his back. "Ink! What happened? What's wrong?!" He tried to coax the other into answering, fear gripping his soul tightly.

"Loud... they won't stop." Ink muttered as he pressed his forehead into

the carpet more. "Creators... they want that damn Help_tale so bad..." He cringed as he spoke, trying to somehow block out the loud demands of the voices he heard.

Dream gasped as he helped Ink sit up more, alarmed by his statement. "W-Well, can you tell them to stop? They've seen how awful that place is... and Errata will just destroy it again!" He reminded the artist. Ink gave Dream a desperate look as he said this, panting a bit from exertion.

"I can't... they don't listen to me." Ink looked completely distressed and Dream had to wonder how long Ink had let this build for it to be so bad.

"Hey..."

Dream looked up at the call, nodding insistently for Ink to continue.

"Do you... do you think you could?" Ink questioned him. "Talk to them, I mean?"

Dream appeared startled by the question. "Is that possible? I-I mean of course I would Ink! Just... how?"

Ink moved his hand to his satchel, withdrawing the white vial. "No no, it's okay!" He soothed him as Dream instinctively tensed his body. "Just... this is the best way to do it. They have... more control when I'm... blank." His voice quivered a bit at that word, and Dream's soul ached for the poor creator.

"Okay, Ink. I-I trust you." Dream agreed. Ink gave him a weak smile

before downing the vial of white paint. He immediately lurched forward and vomited a brown sludge onto the carpet, leaving Dream to scoot further away with a disgusted expression on his face. Dream's breath hitched a bit as Ink's head turned slowly to look at him, those white pinpricks piercing straight through him.

"Dream."

Dream shuddered a bit as he got back to his feet. "Um... Ink? Or... uh, whoever?" He didn't know how to address him now and he felt out of his element. "Um... hello?" He waved weakly. Ink continued to stare through him for a moment before pushing himself up on his feet as well. Dream gulped dryly as he wrung his hands together. "So..."

"You try to stop Ink?"

Dream froze at these words, chilled by the monotone way they were delivered. Even without emotion behind it, they managed to come out threateningly. "I-It's not that! I just... doesn't it seem fruitless??" He attempted. "You know... making a world you've done twice with no viability? I mean-"

Dream flinched as Ink pointed his large brush at him, not making a move to attack or pull away. "Ink doesn't need you to tell him what to do." The artist drawled back at him. "Ink makes what he is told to make."

"And I-I get that! I do! I understand that you, um, *creators* guide him." Dream insisted nervously. "It's just... you know! It's just gonna get destroyed again, over and over, without relent. Errata won't let that world exist so, why not just let it go?" He attempted, seeing the other take a step forward.

"Are you with Ink or against him?"

Dream let out a shaky exhale at this demand, feeling the tension begin to rise. "I'm always with you, Ink." He tried to appeal to him, afraid the other was too far gone to be rationalized with. Ink stepped closer, causing Dream to take a step back in response.

"You're scared of Ink?"

"I'm scared of *you."* Dream emphasized at his question. "I'm scared of what you can do to him. I'm scared of what you can make him do." He clarified. "I'm scared that you're going to drive him insane by trying to make him do these things!" He gasped as he found himself slammed against the wall, the large paintbrush's handle pinning him by his neck. Ink hovered over him, hand gripping either end of Broomie and forcing him into the wall, making him momentarily gag.

"You talk too much." Ink spoke as Dream tried to push against the brush. "You think you know what's best for Ink? You think Ink should listen to you?" He demanded of him. Dream wasn't certain he was speaking to 'Ink' at this point.

"I know what you are," Dream grunted as he narrowed his eyes. "Stop pretending like you're any semblance of him at all. You're just Muses that torment him. You don't care about his well-being at all!" He choked a bit as the brush forced him further against the wall, feet scrabbling against the floor to keep purchase as the other pushed him upward.

"Maybe not, but you're not going to stand in our way." Ink informed as he shoved Dream up further, dragging him up off of the floor entirely. He slammed him against the wall again by the neck, pushing Broomie harder against his throat. The spirit was suspended in the air, only held up by the handle crushing his neck. Dream grasped at the wood

desperately, the pressure on his neck increasing as gravity dragged the rest of his body down. Were they trying to kill him??

Dream gasped weakly as he reached one hand out, touching the stained mark on the artist's face. "I..Ink... please..." He managed weakly. "Y-you're...hurting me..." He choked out with difficulty. He felt like his neck was going to snap if the pressure didn't let up.

Within Ink, a small flutter stirred him.

The artist's white eyelights seemed to dilate significantly, clarity momentarily reaching him as he pulled the brush away. Dream gasped as he crumpled to the ground, one hand resting on the front of his neck. Ink groped around until he found a vial of blue paint, quickly downing half of it before dropping to his knees in front of Dream. Dream coughed a few times as he tried to regain himself, each breath burning his throat.

"I-I'm fine, it's okay..." Dream assured as Ink's hands gripped his shoulders. Dream looked up at Ink, seeing the shifting blue shapes in his sockets. "I know... I know it wasn't you." He soothed the weeping artist.

"I...I hurt you." Ink whispered as soft hitched breaths escaped him. "I...I could've-"

"You didn't," Dream emphasized once more, moving to take one of Ink's hands from his shoulder. He squeezed it tightly, making sure Ink was paying attention. "*They* did. Ink... I know these things aren't a part of you. They're just disembodied beings who want you to do what they want. You wouldn't intentionally hurt me like that Ink, I know you wouldn't." He assured the distressed creator.

"You shouldn't be here..." Ink spoke as he tried to pull away. "I'm too dangerous, I might hurt you. I could kill you, stars I nearly did..." He seemed frantic, and Dream refused to let the other isolate himself again.

Dream yanked him forward again, causing the artist to topple into the other's chest. Dream wrapped his arms around his shoulders, leaning down to rest his skull against his. "You can't push me away, not this time. You're not going to kill me, Ink. I mean, look at you! You gained control all by yourself and took your paint!" He reminded him with pride in his voice.

"I wouldn't have to worry about that if I just had a fucking *soul* like a *normal* monster..." Ink spoke it with such venom that Dream couldn't help but wince.

"Hush, none of that. You can't blame yourself for something you can't control, Ink. It doesn't matter if you don't have a soul because you're still just as valid as any other monster." Dream insisted as he held him tightly. "What you're feeling is just as real as anyone else. It doesn't matter if it came from a bottle because *you* chose the feeling. You didn't have to take your blue vial. You could have chosen any other colour, but you *didn't*. That means somewhere deep down, you already felt sad somewhere."

Ink stiffened a bit in Dream's hold as he said this. Was that true? Did his words hold any semblance of truth to them? Did he reach for that vial because it was what was appropriate for the time, or was it driven by something... more?

"Dream..." Ink whispered softly, clenching his eyes closed tightly.

"I know, Ink," Dream soothed him quietly, leaning back against the wall as the weeping artist desperately clung to him.

"I know..."

Chapter End Notes

This is... well, probably the gayest thing I've written in a long time asdfhg.

To those who have Dm'ed me complaining about Errata and Nightmare courting stuff:

I do not care and I will not change my story because you don't like it. To all else, thank you for reading thus far!
Also, another game of spot the D&D spell!

Chapter 33: Rematch

Chapter Summary

Nightmare is outraged by Ink's actions and Erratum has to intervene between the two brothers. It leads to a more lax, but still tensely charged, game with the spirit.

Chapter Notes

Oh shoot it me again.
I've been busy with job orientation so I've been having a hard time getting my brain working to write. I'll be working 7pm to 7 am Monday-Wednesday and then Wednesday-Friday in alternating weekly schedules. Little exhausting, but hey, not too bad.

Anyway, I'm glad people were weeping over both scenes last chapter. It fills my soul with joy.

Enjoy

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Erratum was surprised when they received a distressed call from Dream.

One moment they had been relaxing peacefully at their altar, watching Geno berate Fresh after managing to 'Fresh poof' his way into his and Reaper's home. The next moment, their entire mind was filled with frantic pleas from the positive spirit. He seemed distressed, but not in danger, as far as they could understand. If the situation was concerning enough for Dream to call for them, however, it was concerning enough for Erratum to answer immediately.

The Guardian felt confused as they landed in the familiar lounge of Nightmare's manor. It certainly wasn't the first place that crossed their

mind when Erratum was considering where he might be. They could only Hope the two brothers weren't quarreling again.

They didn't have to look far as Dream was merely a few feet away, grasping at his brother's cloak desperately while Nightmare flared with violent magic. His tendrils were whipping about in equal outrage and Erratum could only assume whatever happened was drastic enough to throw his corruption back into a more active state.

"**What is going on?**" The two brothers turned abruptly toward them, Nightmare with a scowl on his face while Dream looked distressed. The Guardian was instantly alarmed by the bruising around Dream's neck. "**Dream, what happened?**" They ventured gently, approaching the both of them as though they'd snap at any moment.

"Just... some stuff." Dream smiled shakily. His voice was rough and it sounded painful even to Erratum, making them wince a bit.

"Some stuff??" Nightmare growled as his tendrils reared up. "Dream, he could have *killed* you!" He snapped at his brother's dismissive response.

"He didn't *mean* to!" Dream cringed as he rubbed the front of his cervical spine. "I-It wasn't him! I mean... not *really*. The Muses made him! Nighty, *please* don't do something drastic!"

"No!" Nightmare hissed, slapping his hand away as it grasped his cloak tighter. "He choked you hard enough to leave such a deep bruise, Dream! Everyone is simply idling by and refusing to make the tough decisions. We aren't going to sit here and let some... *monster* run free out there who's capable of doing this to their 'friends'."

Erratum sighed as they moved beside Nightmare. One hand moved up

to a thrashing tendril, running a hand over it and allowing it to wrap tightly to their wrist. "**Easy there, Nightlight.**" The name had come to them the previous night. Seeing Nightmare under the light of the soft glowing orbs covered in reflective golden paint had inspired them. Many of their followers had their own silly little names, and this one simply felt right to the Guardian.

The negativity crept back up to the right side of Nightmare's skull, leaving the spirit to stare wide-eyed and flustered at his brother for a moment. "*Nightlight?!*" He sputtered as he turned his head in their direction, though the traitorous tendrils on his back only wrapped tighter to the god. Dream tried to hide his grin behind his hand, amused by how quickly his brother had gone from intimidating to meek.

"**I already explained to you Ink's condition.**" Erratum reminded, skipping past the other's flustered remark. "**I understand you're worried for Dream, and frankly I am too, but you must keep that in perspective.**" They reminded before glancing at Dream. "**However, I can't say I'm exactly supportive if you decide to continue living with him.**" They admitted.

"It was a one-time thing, a freak accident." Dream insisted at their disapproving looks. "He was fighting the Muses on creating another Help_tale, a-and he didn't! He kept pushing back until I was able to speak with them and... whatever happened seemed to trigger something in him. He hasn't mentioned the voices since last night, and trust me, he was bad when I found him." He remembered how desperate the other was to make it stop. "I...I can't imagine living like that."

"**You spoke with them?**" Erratum questioned with interest. "**How were you able to do that?**"

"Well..." Dream seemed hesitant to explain, glancing quickly from his brother to Erratum. "He... he asked me to. He said the best way to

speak to them was when he was... blank." He rubbed his arm at the surprised look that received.

"The white vial?"

Dream nodded his head slowly. "It... got out of control. He doesn't have any sort of inhibition or restraint when he's like that."

"So he *literally* tried to kill you!" Nightmare seethed as the negativity spread down past his neck again. "Errata, let's find out what happens if we shatter a 'soul' outside of the body."

"No! Nighty, *please!* Errata!" Dream cried out as he turned to them desperately.

The Guardian held their hands up a moment, attempting to placate the both of them. **"We're not doing that. I'm not condoning what happened but I also can't let this be a reason to destroy the progress we've made so far."**

"Fuck the progress!" Nightmare snapped before instantly wincing. "Sorry... language, we know." He muttered as he glanced at Dream. "Our point still stands. Why should we feel obligated to work tirelessly for someone who could up and snap our necks at any moment?" He demanded.

"Because...!" Dream started, glancing back to Erratum before quickly moving to stand at their side. "It would make *both* of us happy if you continued to help!" He insisted with a sheepish grin. Was he being a little manipulative? Perhaps, but he was desperate. He could tell Nightmare knew what he was doing by the dirty look he received.

"I would be very grateful for your continued assistance." Erratum agreed with a soft smile. If looks could kill, Dream was certain he would have dusted at the intensity of Nightmare's glower. Still, he only grinned back at him nervously.

"Fine. We better figure something out soon though. Don't expect us to hold onto that agreement if this keeps happening. We only have so much patience." The darker spirit warned both of them, who nodded in agreement. He zeroed his eyes in on Erratum, narrowing his eyes a bit. "We believe this is as good a time as any to take you up on that rematch." He commented.

"If you're that desperate to lose in another game of chess, I have no objections." Erratum grinned back at his insistence. Nightmare softened his face to a more mischievous smirk at this. **"Ah, feeling confident then?"**

"Oh?" Dream perked up with interest. "A battle of wits then? Kind of fitting for you I guess, Nighty. Better than an actual sparring match where you'd probably-" He gave a startled squeak as his brother's magic levitated him.

"So sorry you have to leave so soon, thank you for your visit, etc, etc." Nightmare drawled before dumping him through another violet portal. He huffed a bit as it closed, leaving him alone with the confused god. The spirit didn't address their confusion, simply jerking his head a bit to signal the other to follow. He wasted no time making his way to the main staircase, checking over his shoulder once to ensure the god was following. Once they arrived on the correct floor, Nightmare led them further down the hall toward his office.

Erratum watched as Nightmare pulled his hand up subconsciously and made a side blinder at the side of his face as they walked. The god was confused by his actions until they began to pass a wall of mirrors. They stopped briefly to admire the spanning glass, considering their own reflection a moment before looking toward the retreating

monster. Their soul pulsed with sorrow at the thought of the other's clear repulsion.

Nightmare was surprised when a set of golden threads wrapped around his wrist. He froze in place and, without warning, Erratum was suddenly right up against his back. "What are you doing?" He questioned softly, anxiety thrumming through his soul.

"Why do you hide from your reflection?"

Nightmare tensed further at the question. He didn't want to have this conversation; not now, not ever if he could manage it.

"Have you looked at yourself since you returned to this form?" Erratum didn't have to probe further to know the answer to this question. They sighed quietly as their hand replaced the strings at his wrist, tightening a bit in a warning.

"Please don't make us do this." Nightmare spoke in a hushed tone, struggling to resist the other's grasp. "I don't... *we* don't want to see it." He admitted in a shaky voice. "This body is... weak. It's frail and vulnerable, not like what we used to be." He clenched his jaw tighter as he said this, bitterness lacing his tone.

Erratum could only feel sorry for him. He had been beaten down by this multiverse until he had revolted, and now he felt powerless once more. Nightmare was proof that the multiverse was a cruel place that chewed people like us up and spits us out. If we misstepped, it would all fall to pieces. No remorse, no hesitation, no logical reason; no order.

Breathe.

Erratum moved to pull at his hand, feeling the spirit's arm go limp and lax in defeat. They guided it away carefully, turning Nightmare's body to face the row of mirrors. Looking over his shoulder, they could see his eyes were squeezed tightly closed. The god moved to stroke their thumb under his left socket, smiling sadly at both of their reflections. "**Just look...**" They encouraged softly, watching the spirit turn his head slightly into their hand.

After a few tense moments, Nightmare forced his eyes open. He was forced face-to-face with himself, causing a breath to stutter loudly in his chest.

It was bizarre to see his original body again, but even more so to see the thick corruption still flowing and submerging the upper right section of his skull. His tendrils moved on their own accord, moving to the glass and prodding it a bit. They swayed a bit in the reflection, as though the other part of himself were admiring their reflection. His eyes slid up further and met Erratum's, which caught his breath for an entirely different reason. Their bright eyelights were staring right back at him, a welcoming smile on their face as they remained pressed against his back.

"I wish you saw what I did."

After lingering far longer than Nightmare would have liked in the hall, the two finally found themselves seated by the curtained window in Nightmare's office. Erratum had noticed that the board and pieces seemed newer and shinier than the last time they had played. Nightmare seemed to find satisfaction in them noticing these small details, tendrils swaying a bit behind him. The god gave a soft laugh and gestured to the board.

"**White goes first, as I'm certain you remember.**" They taunted, watching as the spirit began looking over the board to map out potential moves. "**It's more pleasant when you aren't attempting to manipulate me.**" They commented, watching as Nightmare winced and moved a pawn forward.

"Yes, that... was not our best decision." Nightmare admitted as they took turns pushing pieces forward and strategizing. "We will say one thing regarding what we had mentioned at that time." He spoke up after a moment of thought. He waited until Erratum gave him their attention again before sighing.

"What are you willing to sacrifice?"

Erratum paused mid-move, giving the other a surprised look. "**I don't-**"

"Not regarding your followers or those around you," Nightmare amended at the other's expression. "Of *yourself*."

"Myself?"

Nightmare tutted a bit as he muttered a quiet 'check' and sat back in his chair. "We asked before what you'd be willing to sacrifice to stop us, and we ask the same about this balance and Ink nonsense." He

glanced them up and down a moment with a frown. "How much of yourself are you willing to lose to this cause? How much of your sanity will you surrender to making all of this work?" He could see the other was becoming uncomfortable with the line of questioning, but he didn't relent. "Errata... where will this road lead you?"

Erratum was silent as they moved their pieces, Nightmare allowing them time to mull over his questions. Finally, the god heaved out a heavy sigh and studied the checkered board. "**You've seen my creation, Night. You know what I was put here to do.**"

"We've seen *a lot,* Errata, just from the time in your dreams. That's why we ask." Nightmare informed, noting the quiet flash of concern that passed over their face momentarily.

"**I'm willing to take it as far as it will go.**" They answered honestly, feeling his eyes burning into them. "**I haven't lost myself.**"

"Not yet," Nightmare added on with a small glare. "Your resilience is, well, godly. That will only take you so far and you know it. What measures are you ready to take to get to a solution that may not even exist?"

Erratum didn't want to admit the lengths they were actively ready to go. They didn't want Nightmare to know what they were resolved to do in the end.

Nightmare sat quietly, waiting for the other to respond. After several minutes of silence, he visibly deflated in his seat. "Deep down, we had Hope you would have some silly wise remark to quip back with. Your silence is only more concerning." He commented as he ran a hand over his face for a moment. "You make us feel every bit of these five-hundred years we've been alive." He informed them, causing the Guardian to give the faintest of smiles.

"**Well, if it's any consolation, these past months have made me feel all my millennia as well.**" Erratum snorted out a brief laugh at the stunned look on Nightmare's face. "**What? Does my age shock you that much, Nightlight?**" They taunted as the spirit straightened himself up.

"Ugh... can you stick to calling us Night in public, please? Nightlight is... so embarrassing." Nightmare grumbled as he grumpily shoved over a knight with his rook. "What kind of ridiculous name is that, anyway?"

"**From how you glowed under the lights last night.**"

Nightmare nearly knocked half the pieces over as his tendril jerked abruptly at this response. He growled, thoroughly flustered and annoyed at how casual the other was stating this. "You're mortifyingly blunt, you know that?"

"**I do,**" Erratum seemed amused by this statement, which they probably were. Their ignorance in social situations had developed into more of a joke for them at this point. "**I see no reason to be indirect, however.**"

Nightmare managed to shake off the embarrassment after another moment, huffing in annoyance. "Pulling us back to the original point, you're ready to do anything then?" He stated, watching the other's smile fall from their face.

"**I am,**" The Guardian was firm in their resolve, and Nightmare knew that. "**Until one of us prevails, I will continue to try. I won't stop pursuing until we've reached a solution.**"

"And what if you can't?" Nightmare stared down at the board as he set his piece down. "What happens when you are unable to come to an end? What happens when you've both come to a total standstill?" He leaned back in his chair with a sigh, and Erratum noticed they had ended in a draw. "What happens then?"

Erratum stared down at the tied game, wondering how the other had managed to counter everything and prevent a victor. They huffed a soft laugh as they picked up their queen, turning it over in their hand a moment.

"Well, then I suppose I can only pray for help at that point."

Nightmare didn't find comfort in these words. "Who answers *your* prayers, Errata?" He delved deeper, watching them intently for their reactions. Erratum, to their credit, stayed rather reserved at the unexpected question.

"No one."

Nightmare sighed quietly as he stood from his seat. "Well, this turned out far more depressing than we intended." He admitted as he quietly fed from the waves of negativity the other was giving him. As he spoke these words, however, he noted with confusion that this negativity suddenly rushed away and became virtually undetectable to him. He glanced up at the god's face to see them giving him a smile, though Nightmare was beginning to wonder how *real* it was.

Erratum stood from the table as well and sighed. **"We always seem to dwell on such dark topics when we play."** They commented with dissatisfaction. **"You always seem to back me into a corner one way or another in this game."**

"It isn't our intention, we promise. Just..." Nightmare sighed in frustration as he crossed his arms firmly. "We worry, okay? You're constantly putting yourself in danger and Ink is *clearly* only getting worse. What happens if the next time you encounter him is the last time any of us see you?" He demanded of them firmly. "What do we do then? What would any of us do if you didn't come back?" He bit his tongue to prevent saying anymore, already irritated he had let out that much. The god was studying him quietly, considering all of his questions and accusations.

Finally, they moved around the table to stand in front of Nightmare. The spirit frowned as he looked up at them, annoyed that he would have to stand on his toes just to attempt to reach eye level with them. He jolted as the other enveloped him in an embrace, catching him completely off guard. His arms remained stiff in their crossed position, unsure what to do in this new predicament.

"I will always come back to you. To all of you."

Nightmare's shoulders slumped a bit at this statement, arms uncrossing and moving to encircle the god as well. He pressed his forehead into their chest, giving a broken laugh against them.

"We somehow don't believe you..."

Chapter End Notes

> I planned to have this done yesterday but a wave of depression slapped me in the face HARD. Then shit happened this morning with the family that plummeted me way below where I thought my mood and esteem could go. But! Hopefully, you enjoyed this at least a little bit. Thank you for sticking with me.

Chapter 34: Who I am and where I've been

Chapter Summary

> Nightmare forces Erratum to face some things they've been suppressing for a long time.

Chapter Notes

> Oh hi, I'm still alive. I work 3 days a week in a row 12 hour night shifts, so unsurprisingly I've not had time to write too much. I guess that's why this chapter turned out to be 5300 words asdgf. Anyhow! I'm pretty sure it was Geno's birthday recently, so I've thrown in some stuff for him.
>
> The rest? Well...
>
> Enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Reaper had been eager when he requested a favour from Erratum. The god had been initially surprised by the request, not understanding what he could possibly need with what he asked for.

"You know the garden you've got goin' on? Well, there's something I wanted to ask..."

Reaper was impressed with the work the other had done. A gazebo was a nice touch, a round wooden structure he was currently waiting in. There were vines crawling up the lattice sidings, small blossoms blooming from them every few inches. A few rose bushes lined the area, and a few large stepping stones made a pathway to the stairs of the wooden structure. He had marveled at the rather botanical scene, expressing his thanks to Erratum the moment they had revealed it to him. It was the perfect place to do this.

Speaking of which.

He turned his head to see Geno, beaming at him as his feathers fluffed out a bit. Geno glanced around the area a moment, seeming to admire it as well before climbing the small steps up onto the gazebo. "Well, I'll admit, this is very pretty. Errata made this, I'm guessing?" He smirked as the other gave a small shrug. "Mhmm, so, what is this all about then?"

Reaper only grinned brighter as he grasped one of Geno's hands. "Oh, just wanted to have a pretty place to take my pretty dove."

"I'm leaving."

Reaper laughed as he kept the other from pulling away by tugging him back by the hand. "Okay, okay, I won't tease." He promised him, his demeanor softening a bit. "Actually, there *is* a reason for all of this." He admitted, seeing how it caught the other's attention. Geno sighed as he turned back to him, obviously waiting for him to continue.

Reaper stood up a bit taller and cleared his throat, which seemed to further intrigue his partner. "It's been a while since I wore you down into giving me a chance, hasn't it?" The roll of the other's eyelight confirmed that, yes, it had been. "It feels like it hasn't been that long, and maybe it hasn't been. Bit under a year maybe? Hard to keep track of time moving through universes like I do." He admitted with a small shrug.

"Are you being sentimental or are you going somewhere with this?"

Reaper gave another soft laugh at this. "Be patient, my dove, I promise I'm not just trying to embarrass you." He insisted. "What I'm saying is we've gone through everything in that time period, haven't we? You still have the stargazer lily I first gave you in a little vase on the coffee table." He gave an endeared look as he said this, watching Geno pull his scarf up a bit with embarrassment with his free hand.

"It's a nice flower..."

"I never said it wasn't, and I'm very touched you kept it." Reaper insisted. "What I'm saying is, after all this time and all of the courting steps, we've made it here." He moved to take Geno's other hand, giving him a gentle smile. "So, after everything, here we are." He was being so genuinely sentimental and Geno felt like hiding from the entire situation. "I love you, Geno." He grinned as the other flushed fiercely at this. "I want to bond my soul with you, to make this permanent.

Geno stared at him for a long time, seeming at a loss for words. "Like... soulmates?" He checked, watching the other huff out a small laugh.

"What did you think this entire courting thing was about, Geno? The longer I was with you, the more we did these things together, the more I realized I wanted you to stay with me. You may have just a fraction of a soul, but it's a fraction I want to have with me for the rest of our time together." Reaper moved Geno's hand to rest over his chest, giving him the same fond look as he did. Geno stared at where his hand touched the soft fabric of his cloak, giving a quiet sound of surprise.

"I...I guess I never thought someone would see me like that." Geno admitted with a faint smile. "Especially not some deity. I'm just... well-"

"Don't," Reaper frowned suddenly, seeing where the other was going. "You're just you, Dove. If you *weren't* you, I wouldn't love you now would I? You're stubborn little soul is the only one for me." He assured with delight.

Geno scoffed a bit at this, but the smile didn't leave his face. "Well, you need someone in your life who will keep you in line. My stubbornness is a perfect contender to your blithe mannerisms."

"Hey..."

"So," Geno continued before the other could pout any further. "I accept."

Reaper perked up significantly at this, wings flaring out and shuddering excitedly. "Yeah? You mean it? You will?" He pestered, as though he couldn't believe the other was actually agreeing. Geno shook his head a bit at his behaviour, letting go of his hands to rest them atop both of his shoulders.

"Yes, I mean it. You think I've put up with you this long because I'm some sort of masochist?"

"Well-"

"Don't ruin the moment." Geno cut him off with a warning in his tone. Reaper decided not to make the easy joke. "You know I love you, Reaper. I might not say it too often, but I hope I at least make it known through actions."

Reaper wrapped the other up in his wings as he drew him in closer. "I

know you do. You're so shy when you say it." He grinned as the other grumbled with embarrassment. "Thank you for giving me a chance. I know our first meeting was more me taunting you-"

"Is that not how all of our interactions are?"

"Shhh," Reaper hushed as he pressed the other's skull gently against his chest. "I'm being romantic."

Geno laughed softly at this claim, closing his eye as he leaned against him a bit more.

"Yeah, you are."

Erratum had been acting a little differently since their last meeting with Nightmare, and no one really knew why. The god would only give them all the same smile when they asked if something was wrong, but they never hinted at anything being the matter. It didn't matter how hard they all pushed, the god remained a well of patience and never so much as twitched at their overwhelming questions and prompts.

So, one of them went above the Guardian.

Nightmare had been reentering his office after lunch, having agreed to have more 'family time' as Killer had jokingly called it, when he froze

at the sight before him.

"What the hell are you doing in our office?! And put that stuff down!" Nightmare hissed as his tendrils reappeared and lashed with outrage.

"Aw, c'mon my dude, I'm just lookin'." Fresh insisted as he lounged back in Nightmare's chair, feet propped up on the desk as he curiously sifted through papers in his hands. "Stuff looks wicked boring though. Whys a king gotta do so much paperwork?" His shades changed to "LAME" as he tossed the papers aside carelessly. Nightmare looked ready to impale him for his transgressions, but Fresh didn't appear too worried about it. "Anyways, this ain't a pleasantry call. Nah, this is about my rad homie Errata."

Nightmare seemed to lose some of his aggression, tendrils lax as they twisted together a moment. "Errata? What do you mean? Has something happened?" He pressed with concern, watching as Fresh moved to stand from the desk after a moment.

"Dunno, you tell me, brah."

Nightmare had a feeling of unease as the other tilted his glasses down to stare him down. He felt like a piece of prey being sized up by the other. Fresh slid his shades back up after a moment, circling around the desk to stand in front of him. "Now, let's just have a chat. Host to host, yeah?" He shot him a set of finger guns. "Diggin' the parasitic symbiote, btw's." He insisted, watching as the tendrils swayed behind Nightmare at the acknowledgment. "Now, whatever happened last time between you two seems to have really messed with their mind." He glanced him up and down a moment. "Thought we had a perfectly clear talk 'bout this kinda thing?"

Nightmare raised his hands slightly, as though trying to pacify him. "Whatever you're thinking, we promise it's not like that. Trust us, you

made it *very* clear what would happen." They hadn't expected the annoying parasite to elicit such foreboding energy when he had spoken with Erratum's entire group. "We couldn't help but pry into what they were willing to lose with this whole multiverse strife. They seem ready to sacrifice nearly everything and, well..."

Fresh hummed a bit as he listened, his shades simply displaying a set of ellipses. "Can't say I haven't thought the same before. Feel like they're gonna run themselves into the ground before then." He admitted with a soft sigh. "Well, lemme make this clear then, in case I didn't last time." He started as he found himself beside Nightmare, slinging his arm around his shoulders. "We're all watchin' ya, broski." He squeezed his shoulder a moment. "Don't funk this up, you feel me?"

"Yeah... we feel you." Nightmare assured as he eyed the hand on him with distaste. "We think we have an idea that may benefit all parties." He felt Fresh pat his shoulder a moment before pulling back and grinning.

"Dat's what I like to hear, my goopy friend." Fresh spoke, as though he hadn't silently threatened him moments before. "Let's Hope for your sake it's effective, my dude."

Ah yes, there was that threatening tone.

"Catch ya on the flipside dude! I'll be watchin'!" The vibrant monster assured before vanishing in a cloud of obnoxious colours. Nightmare shuddered momentarily before kneeling down to begin collecting the papers the other scattered.

And he thought *his* little 'family' was fucked up.

Erratum was curious when Nightmare requested them to meet him in Dreamtale. Not at his manor, where Erratum had assumed he had wanted, but at the base of the tree of feelings. The god had been admittedly curious as they stepped into the world. Nightmare was already there, kneeling at the stump soundlessly. Erratum was quiet as they approached, watching him curiously as he continued to stare at the stump.

"You can sit down, you know." Nightmare commented, seeming to sense the other with ease. Erratum smiled and quietly settled beside him, allowing the silence to continue for a while. They could tell the other wanted to say something but was hesitating.

"So," Nightmare began after another moment. "The tree, as we're sure you know, wasn't just a tree." He started, to which Erratum nodded in understanding.

"**It was your mother.**" Erratum replied, watching Nightmare nod his head solemnly. "**I understand you have ambivalence regarding her.**"

Nightmare huffed out a small laugh at this. "You could say that." He remarked quietly. "We're not even sure if she truly ever loved us or Dream. She made us as a failsafe to protect her and the tree once she merged with it. We were thrust into this world with a life already decided for us." He sighed quietly. "Still, she was our mother, and she's the only family other than Dream that we had. We wonder if she would have liked you."

"**I doubt it,**" Nightmare glanced over to them in surprise at their answer. "**We wouldn't have gotten along, not with how both of your lives went. I'm not one to tell a mother how to raise her**

children, however..."

Nightmare gave a startled laugh at this, shaking his head a bit. "You're ridiculous, we Hope you know that." He watched as the other gave a soft smile, shifting to settle more comfortably beside him. The darker spirit frowned a moment as he glanced down at the other's lap. He gently lifted the bottom of their robe the slightest bit, entirely perplexed. "Where are your shoes?"

"What shoes?"

"You don't-?" Nightmare gave them a bizarre look at their answer. "You've never worn shoes. Ever." He gave the other an unimpressed look as he flatly stated it rather than questioned them.

"No," Erratum replied as they fixed their robes again. **"I have always worn solely what Karma had given me, nothing more and nothing less."** They explained. They didn't see what the big deal was; they had never needed shoes before.

"You're so strange." Nightmare breathed out another quiet laugh. "We're sure you've heard that a lot in your time."

"Like you wouldn't believe." Erratum smiled the faintest bit at his exasperation, clearly entertained. **"Can I tell you something I find a bit amusing?"** They watched the other nod a bit, attention fully captured. **"My name isn't Errata."**

Nightmare jolted a bit at this information, staring at them wide-eyed. "Wh-? Then why... but you've always... and you *introduce* yourself that way...!" The spirit flushed in embarrassment at the laugh it provoked from them. "Fine! Then what *is* your name?"

"Well, I'm certain I had a different one before all of this 'god stuff' happened. Originally, however, my name was Erratum." The god informed the flustered spirit, watching as he took in this information. **"I know, it's hardly a difference as far as what it means."**

"How did you come to start using Errata then?"

"Blue declared my name not 'godly' enough and renamed me. I've just run with it since then."

This startled another laugh out of Nightmare, who placed a hand on his forehead and closed his eyes. "Once again, you're just... so absolutely *strange*."

Erratum gave a quiet laugh at this, shaking their head a bit. **"We're getting away from the point, however. I'm touched you would have wanted your mother to meet me, even if we would have inevitably bickered the entire time."** They rested a hand on his back, to which Nightmare's tendrils quickly twisted around in response. The darker spirit didn't bother feigning annoyance, sensing the other had been lured deep enough into this topic for him to strike.

"What about your own family?"

Erratum tensed the slightest bit before quickly relaxing, giving him a sad smile. **"I couldn't say, sadly. I don't recall any of my family other than vague shapes and voices. I'm certain you know that, however."** They reminded him, though Nightmare didn't look too chastised over it.

"Doesn't that bother you?" Nightmare ventured further, turning his body a bit to better face them. "You exude a perfectly calm demeanor most of the time, but," His eyes flashed their respective colours a moment with a tight frown. "You forget that we are extremely sensitive to negative emotions." He scanned the god's face, feeling that familiar quick blip and fade of negativity.

"I don't-"

"Sh," Nightmare cut them off just as quickly, not wanting the other to smooth talk their way out of this. "Just like that. You did it the other day, too. Something hit home for you, and there was a brief swell of emotion before it was crammed back down just as quickly. Now, normally we'd admire someone who is that versed in suppressing their emotional response," He narrowed his eyes a bit at them as the other attempted to remain passive. "*However,* it's becoming increasingly obvious that this goes beyond simple emotional control."

Erratum didn't want to have this conversation, especially not with the emotional spirit of all people. Erratum felt as though the spirit was slowly pulling back layers to gaze underneath the collected front they always had. "**I've had thousands of years to perfect controlling my response to a situation. It's useful when you need to react logically and not out of an emotional response.**"

"We really Hope you don't think us that foolish." Nightmare drawled with a shake of his head. "You react *so* emotionally *so* often, Errata." He pointed out with an unimpressed expression. "Everything you do, or at least a great portion of it, has been driven by your animosity with Ink. You answer the prayers of others with such earnest conviction that you're willing to put yourself in danger just to try and help. Don't you tell *us* you don't act out of an emotional response." He huffed a bit. He sighed quietly as he scanned the other over.

"You haven't dealt with the deep seeded trauma from losing your home and, well, from your 'conversion'. I saw that first hand; there is

no possible way you've processed all of that with how you behave." Nightmare could sense the other becoming guarded, sighing heavily as he quickly moved to sit in front of them. "Can you at least be a little honest with us? Please? You've made us face a lot of things we didn't want to face..." He felt a little conniving as purple magic swirled around him a moment as he spoke. "Couldn't you do the same for us? Just once?"

Erratum stared at him for quite a while, a small itching at the back of their mind that they ignored after a moment. "**I... suppose I can attempt to humor you.**" They relented, which seemed to satisfy the spirit. They weren't sure why they agreed to such an interrogation, but it was a bit late to back out of it now.

Nightmare stared through them a moment, trying to decide where to start. "Do you *really* believe you've made peace with everything that's happened?" He began, figuring it was as good a place to start as any. Erratum frowned and titled their head a bit at the question. "The things you've been through, Errata. Losing your home, being put into such a precarious situation, becoming someone entirely different than who you once were?" He had to dig deep to get them to open up, even if it meant subjecting them to some agony of the memories.

"**Yes, I do believe I have.**" Erratum answered without so much as a flinch. "**I can't say that it has been easy, not by any means, but I'm content with what I have. Keeping the balance is a constant struggle, but it keeps everyone alive. Through my time here, I've gained a new purpose and a wide variety of friends and family that I care for. I can't say I would want it to change.**" They explained to him. They had hoped it would soothe the other a bit, but it only caused him to pierce through them with a gaze that seemed *far* too knowing for the god's comfort.

"I think I get it,"

Erratum sure hoped he'd explain because they sure didn't.

"You're afraid." Nightmare saw the confusion on their face as he declared this, sighing softly at their surprise. "You're terrified of everything collapsing in again. You couldn't stop your original world from being destroyed, so you try your hardest to keep every other world here from suffering the same fate. You hold on to this guilt, severely misplaced I might add, and feel you *have* to be so self-sacrificing. You're afraid of losing your life again, of losing the ones you love."

"I-"

Nightmare didn't give them time to interject. "Don't give us the 'it's my job' spiel, either. Your job is perfectly clear; to maintain balance. That includes finding a way to rectify the creation situation, and while we'll give you a pass with the whole Ink soul restoration thing, we won't for everything else. You get sidetracked picking up the pieces of other people's lives, you answer even the smallest of prayers that without intervention would be fine on its own. You have... well, a control problem. You feel so out of control of what happened that you only feel comfortable if these things are left up to you."

Erratum was quiet, and Nightmare noted how their emotions quickly rushed back down again as though they hadn't been there.

"What is it that you're doing?" Nightmare questioned with a frown. "When you start feeling that intense negativity, how do you suppress it so efficiently?" He prodded, a bit concerned with how they were coping.

"Compartmentalizing," Erratum answered honestly. Nightmare seemed surprised by this response.

"You... understand that's a trauma response, right?" Nightmare questioned with concern. "You can't separate out your trauma from your emotions, not forever. You keep pushing all of that stuff down into a box, it's gonna break loose one day." He warned them, expression softening a bit. "When's the last time you opened that box? When was the last time you let yourself grieve your losses?"

"I don't... I'm fine, I assure you. I don't have time to slow down and feel sorry for myself. Keeping it all separated and filed away keeps my mind clear." Erratum was on the defense and Nightmare could tell he was starting to break through whatever false calm they had tried to display.

"You're not a machine, Errata." Nightmare sighed with frustration. "Try as you might, you can't put all your thoughts and feelings in a compressed file and store it somewhere else. It's all still right there at the ready for when you finally break." He scooted in closer to them, taking their hands and squeezing them tightly. "Tell me your woes, please. For once in your life be vulnerable, if only for a moment." He attempted to plead with them. "Is it difficult living this life?" He watched the other turn their head away, fighting that last bit of willpower. Nightmare tightened his hands as a jolt of violet magic raced up their arms.

"Answer."

And the god broke.

Nightmare winced as their grip tightened impossibly more on his hands, but he didn't voice any complaints as Erratum hunched their body forward. He felt a tiny bit guilty for pushing them so hard, but they needed this. They couldn't keep this festering inside them forever.

"**It... it is.**" The Guardian breathed after another tense moment of silence. "**It's... childish to say it's not fair, but-**"

"It *isn't* fair, Errata." Nightmare butted in with a sharp frown. "You're allowed to feel that way and, frankly, we'd be a little upset if you didn't." He insisted at their hesitation.

"**I don't *want* to do this,**" The god admitted, which didn't really surprise the spirit all that much. "**This is what I've been commanded to do, and there is no changing that. Believe me, I've tried. I've begged and pleaded with the other Guardians, but this is who I am now.**" They continued, unable to stop now that they had started. "**It makes me sick... to think I don't even remember my own brother's face, or who I used to be, or where I came from. My entire world was taken from me, and I'm supposed to be... *grateful?* For ascending to this status?**" The bitterness was a newer tone, but Nightmare felt it was entirely justified.

"You have every right to feel robbed. Power and status... we've learned ourselves that it doesn't fill the void. It doesn't make things better, and it certainly doesn't make you happy." Nightmare huffed out a weak laugh at this. He never would have thought he'd be one to say that after all this time, but it was entirely true. He had never felt a sense of contentment ruling his kingdom all of those years.

"**I'm so lost, even now, even after all of this time. There's so much I don't understand, things I know I did before. My memories, whatever wasn't taken from me, are muddy at best and out of my reach. And do you think I was always so calm being on my own?**" They gave a weak, pained laugh at this. "**The first dozen years or so I was in my plane, there was nothing but aching loneliness that I couldn't rectify. It took decades before I made peace with that and was able to pass the time in stasis. I *do* fear what will happen to everyone if I fail... that's why I have to be ready to do anything to succeed.**"

Nightmare didn't like the implications the other continued to drop on him, but it wasn't the time to address it. He moved his hands to allow their hunched figure to press into him, tendrils wrapping tightly around them as he pressed their head against his shoulder. It stung, he distantly noted, as the condensed magic that was their tears dripped onto their bones. The spirit noted the tremors running through them and the quickly increasing rate of their gasps. The other was on the verge of a full meltdown which is far beyond what the other wanted from this experience. He knew he needed to calm them before they completely crumbled.

Nightmare leaned their forehead against the top of their head, eyes glowing as a light misting of magic surrounded them. He felt the other tense a moment, attempting to fight the compulsion before they became limp against him. The spirit sighed in relief as he managed to maneuver them to lie back on the grassy ground, completely unconscious. "You really are a difficult one, draining our magic just to get you to open up." He muttered softly. He wasn't done, however, as he scooted closer and rested a hand against their forehead. He closed his own eyes as he delved into their mind, feeling the tug of their dreams.

It was cold, and the dark felt oppressing.

This felt different than a normal bad dream, Nightmare noted as he scanned through the environment quietly. He noticed Erratum in the distance, kneeling on the ground, and head hanging low. He was perturbed by this, venturing a bit closer.

Then, he heard something. It sounded like static, but the more he focused, the more it began to sound like words.

"All it takes is a little emotion and you lose control? It would be hilarious if it wasn't also so very sad*."*

Nightmare didn't recognize this voice, and as he narrowed his eyes further, he could faintly make out a figure outlined in static. It hurt his eyes to stare at and there was no discernable shape in the glitching mess.

"You're too soft on him, you know that. How are we to do our job if you keep sidetracking and-"

"**There is no 'we',**" Erratum spoke up, frowning sharply as they continued to stare at the floor. "**There has never been, and never will be, a *we.*"**

"Not yet, maybe. It's only a matter of time before you realize you can't do this without me. We've worked well in the past, haven't we?"

"**I don't like to remember those times.**"

The voice seemed to laugh and it grated in Nightmare's mind like nails on a chalkboard. *"Don't be like that. We make a great team, and the more worlds you consume, the stronger we become. The stronger* I *become."* The figure seemed to mock them as it swarmed closer. *"Don't you want all of this to stop? Don't you want there to be peace? Your methods have never worked and I'm growing tired of waiting for you to realize that. There will be no Order without us, and you have to understand that. We will inherit this multiverse and be the rightful ruler; perfectly fair, everything perfectly balanced."*

"**It will be a cold day before I resolve to that.**"

Nightmare felt the god said this a lot. He knows they certainly had said it to him several times in the past.

"Every day the temperature is dropping a little lower, Erratum." It mocked back. *"Hell freezing over isn't as implausible as you think it is."* They stated, forcing the other's head up with a hard grasp of static against their jaw.

"And every time, you listen to me a little bit longer than the last."

Erratum moved quickly, grasping onto the lid of a small box in front of them and leaning all of their weight on it. It took a few agonizing moments, but they finally forced it closed, the distant sound of staticky laughter fading away. Erratum kept themself against the box, as though trying to force it to stay closed. They didn't even notice another presence as it drew closer, their mind preoccupied with what had just happened.

"You know... that actually explains a lot."

Erratum jerked up a bit at the voice, anxiety fueling them as they met Nightmare's gaze. The other didn't appear disgusted or mortified, however. "**You weren't... nobody was supposed to see this. No one was supposed to know about this...**" They spoke quietly, hands tightening as the little box faded away. Nightmare gave them a pitying look, unable to help himself.

"We would never judge you for something like this." Nightmare assured, watching as the other leaned forward more to hide from his gaze. Nightmare sighed quietly, racking his brain for what he could do in this situation. He'd only been good at giving and consuming bad dreams; good dreams had always been his brother's forte.

But...

Nightmare closed his eyes as he began to dig through the god's mind. He recalled the nightmare he had inspired the first time he entered their mind and decided to follow that line of memory. They clenched their eyes closed tighter as the world around them changed. He was out of practice with this sort of thing but he was willing to try for them.

Erratum glanced up as the black void transformed into a cozy living room area. They distantly remembered seeing this room in a previous dream but they couldn't quite recall the details of it. They hitched their breath a bit as the faceless Papyrus appeared once more, causing the memories of the nightmare to return.

"Hold on..." Nightmare spoke, capturing their attention again. The other seemed to be in deep concentration, eyes clenched shut and beads of sweat dotted their brow. The expression eased a bit as they tilted their head up a bit, seeming to find something.

Erratum stared on with numbness in their body as the faceless monster began to change. They could soon identify more features on them, and soon, even their face became recognizable again. The monster was staring at them in surprise, a strip of measuring tape draped around their neck as though he had just been measuring something. A few buttons were sticking to their face, seeming like they had been accidentally glued there. His eyelights were curious as he stared at Erratum, though there was still a fondness to his features.

"Ah! On the floor again, Sans? Didn't we just have a discussion about your medication?" The Papyrus lightly chastised them. "At least you're wearing your glasses!"

Erratum gave a tearful laugh, the gold lines on their face glowing

brighter as they wept. "Heh... lose control of the glue gun again?" They questioned, watching as the other patted down his face in response. Papyrus gave a few sheepish laughs, attempting to pull the buttons from his face.

"Well! It... was a hard-fought battle! The pesky thing is so volatile! We need to get a new one!" He complained as he managed to free himself of a few buttons. Erratum felt a weak pulse of agony and longing at seeing their brother for the first time in... centuries. They managed to get back up on their feet, turning their gaze onto Nightmare as he moved to stand beside them.

"So... this is your brother?" Nightmare questioned with a soft smile on his face. It was clear that Papyrus had been a caring and gentle soul, and knowing that Erratum had been forced to watch him perish in their doomed world brought a deep sadness to their soul. Erratum tried to wipe their face with one sleeve, resulting in several sharp threads clinging to the robe.

"Yeah... this is Papyrus, my brother. He... he was my entire world."

Chapter End Notes

marks off step 5

I hope you enjoyed this mix of fluff, angst, and foreshadowing dread!

Nightmare used a lot of spells on Errata this chapter without them realizing it asdfg. Have a mentioned I've made a spellbook for Nightmare? He's a regular wizard that boy.

Chapter 35: Face it

Chapter Summary

Everyone learns a little bit more about Erratum, including Erratum.

Chapter Notes

Henlo. Writing this on the 15th, I know it's gonna be at least 3 more days until I post it due to work and a hospital visit on Friday asdgfh, my bad.

https://www.deviantart.com/vcl2006/art/A-deity-s-burden-926324414 ALSO THIS HAPPENED. VCL. PLZ

But! As everyone has been asking for QUITE a while, here we get to finally explore a tiny bit the world Destiny made that originally held Erratum. Ya know, before it all went to hell. So, enjoy FINALLY hearing about my silly little alternate universe: Hobbytale.

Enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Nightmare huffed a quiet laugh as he listened to Erratum recount the few memories they had about their world. They had moved back into Erratum's plane after they had awoken and now everyone was gathered around their altar. They all seemed eager to learn a bit more about where they had come from.

"So, you both owned like... your own little shop? Like a hobby-type shop?" Geno questioned curiously. He was fascinated to hear how simplistic and, well, *normal* their universe had seemed to be.

"That's correct, we all did." Erratum replied with a small

smile. "**Unsurprising to any of you, I'm sure, my focus was on crafting and knitting supplies. Papyrus did his best helping me, but it was never his forte.**" They seemed to recall something fondly as they said this. "**He was really good at making miniatures and small action figures. He constantly had paint on his hands and would leave prints all over the shop. I recall him helping others around town with various projects as well; he was kind of a jack-of-all-trades.**"

"At least you know why you always knew how to sew and knit, even after everything." Geno pointed out. He was relieved that the other had some memories to cling to now. He couldn't imagine how awful it felt to know you once had a happy life but no memories of it.

"Your world sounds like it was a wonderful place," Dream spoke with a sad smile. "I'm sorry it suffered such a horrible Fate... but, I'm glad you decided to let others back into your heart after losing so much." He remarked though Erratum remained silent in quiet agony at the reminder.

"We do have a question if you can remember anything." Nightmare spoke up with a thoughtful look on his face. "That was the second time he had mentioned your 'medicine' when you were on the floor. What exactly was that all about?" He questioned them, curious as to what the other might have been suffering through.

Erratum's face took on one of confusion, realizing the other was correct. They couldn't remember much about their past life, but they could faintly recall some sort of ailment they had struggled with throughout their time there. "**I can't recall what it was called, it's kind of illuding me. I remember... winding up on the floor a lot and not remembering how I got there. It was like my body got really stiff and then weak, and I was always so... *tired.* I remember being absolutely exhausted most of the time.**"

Nightmare seemed to understand a bit more than Erratum did. "Does

the word 'narcolepsy' sound right?" He questioned, watching as their head quickly turned to look at him.

"Yes! That was it," The Guardian seemed excited to learn something new, bringing another faint echo of affection from the spirit.

"Go figure," Cross commented with a roll of his eyes. "You had a condition that made you fall asleep all the time, and now we can't even get you to sit down and take a nap." He couldn't help but see the irony in this. "I feel like your 'ascension' may have overcompensated a bit too much. Now you can't even sleep without being forced to." He seemed a little annoyed by this fact. "If you were made to be this champion for Destiny, why would they give you something so debilitating?"

"Perhaps to make me more relatable to others in the multiverse? I couldn't tell you for certain, but I agree that it *is* rather annoying thinking back on it. It definitely could have caused me a lot of issues and potentially put me in danger if that Fate ever played out." Erratum frowned in consideration at this. They didn't understand a lot of the decisions the Guardians had made, especially toward the beginning of the multiverse's creation. They doubt they'd ever find out, even if they questioned the Council.

"I have a lot of questions I'd like to ask the other Guardians one day." Cross scowled a bit as he said this, as though envisioning *precisely* what they'd say to them.

"We certainly Hope you don't have some sort of death wish." Nightmare commented at the other's sour tone. "They could wipe you clean out of existence like *that,"* He emphasized with a snap of his fingers. Cross didn't look too confident after that. Erratum nudged him a bit, giving him a slightly disapproving look. "What? We're right, you know." Nightmare protested at the god's disapproval, absently moving his hands to straighten and adjust the crescent moon clasp on the god's robes.

Dream held back a noise at their behaviour, once again finding them absolutely Hopeless; ironic as one of them was the champion of Hope. They instead moved to retrieve something from his inventory, fighting to keep his smile from becoming mischievous as he pulled out a book. "Oh, Errata! We finished that book you gave us, by the way-"

"And?" The god appeared smug as Dream huffed a bit and Nightmare glared at them. **"Considering you made it all the way through I'm guessing you found it useful?"** They seemed rather pleased with themself, while Nightmare's tendrils prodded at them less gently than normal.

"*You* need to read through it. If *we're* codependent, what does that make *you?"* Nightmare protested in response to this.

"Did you give them that book I gave you?" Blue immediately spoke up with displeasure. "That was for you to read! Not for you to give away! He's right too, you have horrific codependency!" The little champion chided them with frustration. It was clear he wasn't going to get through to the stubborn deity, but he also wouldn't give them the satisfaction of backing down.

"Anyway!" Dream attempted to pull them back on track, not wanting the topic to become overrun before they could do this. "I figured you needed this now! I marked the pages for you to start at so you could properly prepare yourself." He passed the book over to the god, who hummed with interest and flipped it open.

It appeared to be an older book, the slight bristling and irritated lash of tendrils causing the god to suspect it was likely one of the darker spirit's books. As they landed on the marked page, however, Nightmare made a strangled noise. Erratum gave him a confused look at his outburst, noting how flustered he appeared as he tried to read over their shoulder now.

"Ah, about the bonding ceremony. Thank you, Dream." The Guardian smiled as they skimmed the first page a bit. They had been getting faster at translating in their mind, but they were certain it would still take them a bit to get through the material they needed. They were no Nightmare, after all.

"Yup!" Dream grinned smugly as he moved his arms over his head and stretched a bit. The bruise around his neck had begun to turn a mix of green and yellow. "Since you'll need to know how to do all of that soon, I figured it would be helpful for you to read about it all!" He seemed rather pleased with himself but Erratum thought nothing of it. They assumed this was to teach them how to properly conduct the ceremony for Reaper and Geno since they would need a higher deity to perform the ceremony.

Dream glanced at Nightmare, clearly having meant for it to be a double meaning. Nightmare, for his part, looked entirely embarrassed and scrambled up to his feet. Erratum glanced back at him with confusion as the spirit pulled away from them all.

"We uh, we need to go." That was all the spirit said before disappearing in a dark puff of magic. The group began to snicker and laugh amongst themselves, drawing Erratum's confused attention once more. They were clearly not getting whatever joke the others were snickering about.

"Dream, your brother is terrible at hiding his intentions," Cross remarked with a laugh. Geno nodded his agreement, amused despite his initial displeasure with Nightmare's pursuit of the god.

"Oh, I know. It was a little devious but that's what brothers do!" Dream giggled as he recalled the mortified look on his twin's face. "They tease each other!"

"I'm obviously missing something here." Erratum frowned as they all exchanged laughs and words with one another. The group paused after a moment, each of them looking back at the god with a mixture of confusion and disbelief. The god wasn't sure what they had done to deserve such a look, but they were certain they were about to find out.

"You're... you're kidding, right?" Geno glanced at Dream, who only sighed and shook his head a bit. "No, I *refuse* to believe you're that oblivious, Errata." Geno narrowed his eyes a bit as he watched them, trying to somehow peer through the other's disposition. The god appeared genuinely confused, however, and Geno looked back to Dream in disbelief.

"Oh, I know," Dream sighed with obvious exhaustion.

"But-!" The other stammered. "They're so far into it!"

"I know..." Dream sighed.

"The gift exchange?!" Geno sputtered.

"I *know,"*

"The paint??" Blue continued, seeming to share their disbelief.

"I know! Trust me, I've been watching this painful dance the *entire* time!" Dream threw his hands up at their pestering questions, looking just as frustrated.

"I'm sorry but I don't have any idea what you all are talking about." Erratum frowned at their group's clear exasperation. **"Did I do something?"**

Dream gave them a flat look, breathing out a heavy sigh.
"I *really* thought you would have caught on by now. I just... I didn't think there was *any* possible way you were *still* doing this without even realizing it." They could tell Erratum was becoming equally frustrated by their lack of understanding.

Geno decided enough was enough.

"You realize Nightmare is like... *in love* with you, right?" Geno spoke directly, causing the group to jolt at his blunt confrontation. "You're fucking with us at this point, you *have* to be."

Erratum blinked a few times in surprise at his words, breathing out a weak laugh at this. **"That's... preposterous."** They insisted, which only caused a few groans to roll through the group again. **"I'm serious!"**

"Why are you so dumb??" Cross demanded as he rubbed at his temple bones momentarily. "You're so wise and logical, Errata, but damn if you aren't just... *dense.* So very, very *dense.*"

"I take offense to that."

"Good,"

Dream hushed them all a moment, giving Erratum a tired expression. "Errata," He sighed as he shoved aside his aggravation a moment. "We're being completely serious. I'm so tired of watching you two dance around each other without directly coming out and saying it." He could tell the other was still guarding and dismissing their claims. "Errata, I of all people would know! You think he hasn't *told* me about it?" He pointed out.

"That... I don't," Erratum tried to find words as anxiety kicked up in the core of their being.

That couldn't be right. It *couldn't.*

"Shush!" Dream immediately hushed them with a small glare. "Nighty has been very open to me about how he feels."

"And me," Cross commented, much to Erratum's surprise.

"And me, sadly," Geno grumbled as well.

"He's told all of us his intentions." Blue agreed with a pitying look on his face.

"What intentions??"

The group exchanged looks with each other as if saying, "you're hearing this too, right?"

"Please," Dream steepled his hands in front of his face, closing his eyes

to keep it together. "Just... think about all the times you two have been around each other. *Especially* recently." He encouraged them.

Erratum furrowed their browbones at him a moment before recalling their past encounters. They remembered Nightmare's odd behaviour at times, yes, but nothing that stood out to them. The small playful jabs they'd make at one another and taunts were surely just them being close companions.

They recalled the mixture of paint; how the bright golden smears left smudges on their own hands when they had touched his face to admire it. They hadn't even gotten any of the work done that they had originally shown up to do once they had seen him. They had been mesmerized and all thoughts of discussing soul magic had gone out the proverbial window. There had been a moment they had considered that the encounter was somehow significant, but they never readdressed the idea. They had thought nothing of it at that point, not until now. That... didn't necessarily mean anything, however.

Speaking of soul magic, they recalled how readily the spirit assisted them in trying to fit Ink's soul back together despite Nightmare's animosity toward the artist. Nightmare had claimed it was to sate his own curiosity and relieve any sort of debt he may have to Erratum, however. That had been strictly business related.

Then, there had been the strangely charged exchange when they had given him the bracelet to wear. Nightmare had seemed captivated by it, but Erratum had brushed it off as fascination with Erratum's own magic. His presentation of the book to them, however, had been something a little different. They couldn't deny that there had been something to that but they hadn't considered it until then. What had Nightmare wanted to say before Dust interrupted him?

Then, yesterday happened.

The raw, open emotions.

The gentle words.

Nightmare peering into their very being and passing no judgment on the things Erratum held inside them.

Reshaping their mind to reveal past memories to them.

How they held their arm when Erratum had spoken in between tears of their life, both before and after their ascension.

Dream watched the other struggle through their thoughts, their expressions shifting and pinching every few moments as they fought with themself. Dream didn't understand why it was so difficult for the other to believe all of them. He was jarred out of his thoughts as he was practically punched with a blast of negativity, nearly wheezing from the sudden force of it. He watched as Erratum stared back at all of them, a tormented expression on their face.

"Errata..?" Dream ventured carefully.

"He can't... he *can't,* Dream." The god sounded as if they were begging rather than speaking with disbelief.

"What do you mean?" Cross chimed in, seeming to sense the same thing Dream did. "He absolutely *can* and he *does*." He continued to press the matter.

"No," Erratum shook their head, the grass tearing up under their hands as they gripped it tightly.

"I don't *want* him to."

The group was stunned by this declaration, obviously caught entirely off guard.

"W-What do you mean?" Dream stammered in shock. "Errata, I... I didn't think you'd-"

"No way, bullshit." Geno cut in with a frown. "I don't know why you're acting like this but I'm not buying it for a second." He watched the god push back against this claim. "You're going to sit here and boldly claim that you don't feel *something?"*

"I'm... a little surprised to hear that too." Blue agreed with the rest of the group. "Errata do you really...? Feel nothing?" He watched as the god got to their feet, pulling away from the conversation entirely.

"I have work to do."

They all watched them vanish through a rift before any of them could protest any further. The group exchanged another set of looks with each other, obviously shaken from the tense conversation.

"I still don't believe that," Geno spoke after a moment of tense silence.

"I...I don't know, Geno." Dream muttered as they wrung their hands together. "They seemed so... serious about it. So absolutely firm and certain."

Geno huffed a bit at this, shaking his head. "Yeah, *that's* why I don't believe them."

Erratum wasn't too surprised with the number of calls they had to answer that day. They'd been slacking a bit at the encouragement of the others, knowing they weren't entirely wrong and that they didn't have to answer *every* call. Some things could be resolved on their own without the god's intervention, and they were doing their best to keep that in mind. There were plenty of other calls that they still found necessary to answer, however.

There were plenty of bugs and viruses to be squashed in misbehaving universes. There were always souls to comfort, even if it was the hundredth time they had done it. For those they comforted, however, it was always the first time to them since resets never ended. Erratum was always patient with them, always offering the same sympathy and kindness each time.

They also had universes to negotiate with regarding the war propaganda. They had never made too much leeway into that area, however, and it usually ended in Ink showing up to drive them back. Erratum never put up much of a fight, leaving willingly to prevent more conflict. This left them with very little to do, however, and thus way too much time to think.

They had wound up back in Reapertale, staring up at the temple of Karma as though it would solve their problems. They resolved themself to sitting on the steps at the entrance, breathing a quiet sigh as they withdrew the book from their robe. It was at the very least a peaceful spot for them to pour over some of this information. Geno deserved this from them, at the very least, if nothing else. They wanted to do this for them before everything went to hell.

They sat there for a while, reading through the bonding ceremony and the things they would need to be prepared for. Some of it confused them to no end and they'd have to ask for further clarifications from Dream regarding it. Did they *have* to say these words specifically during the entire thing? What were the rings for? Why did they need *sand??*

They glanced up abruptly at the sound of rustling leaves. They had been so distracted with their thoughts that they hadn't noticed any other presence in the circle of temples. They turned their head in the direction of the noise, catching a glimpse of black fabric as it retreated behind one of the pillars. Erratum moved to set their book beside them, curious about this newcomer.

"**No need to hide from me, I'm not going to harm you.**" Erratum spoke up, knowing whoever was spying was still listening to them. "**This is a place of worship and contemplation. There's no reason to feel you aren't allowed to be here.**" They continued to encourage.

It took a handful of seconds for them to notice the shifting of fabric again against the stone fixture. They were patient as the person's head appeared from around the pillar, staring them down with a withdrawn mannerism and cautious air. Erratum recognized Chara pretty quickly, though they were curious why this universe's fallen child was currently spying on them.

"**Ah, hello Chara.**" They greeted gently, holding out their hands palms up with a faint smile. "**No need to be so hesitant, I'm just passing the time with a book.**" They assured the suspicious child. Chara continued to linger behind the pillar a moment, trying to further scope out the scene and detect any deception from the other. Slowly, they moved themself away from the stone structure and floated themself over to the stone stairs. They stared down at the god's hands a moment before reaching their own out to place them in the waiting hold.

"**Good,**" Erratum soothed with a faint smile. "**I'm Errata,**" They noticed the slight nod they gave at this. "**You're aware of who I am? I guess that isn't surprising.**" They hummed a soft sound of affection as the child gave a ghost of a smile. "**Is there something that you needed?**"

They gave a shake of their head.

"**No?**" The god hummed, a bit perplexed by this child. "**Perhaps you just need some company?**" There was no response to this, and Erratum supposed they were a little too proud to admit to such a thing. "**I see. Would you like to sit with me for a while?**"

A nod.

"**Okay, let's sit for a while.**" They encouraged gently as they crossed their legs to get more comfortable. Apparently, the child took that as an invitation and crawled into their lap. Erratum was a little surprised by this but made no move to push them away as they settled comfortably against them. They gave a faint smile as they resolved themself to sitting here for a while in quiet contemplation. They were snapped out of it rather quickly as Chara moved to drag the book closer again, causing the god to retrieve it and open it up.

"**Would you like me to read?**" They questioned, seeing the child move their head to peer down at the book resting in their own lap now. They flipped through a few pages curiously, landing on something after a moment and waiting patiently. Erratum took that as their cue and began reading slowly to them. It was still a struggle to translate and then directly speak the words out loud, but the child seemed patient enough with them. After several topics on deity laws, summoning rituals, and even reality shifting, they came across the courting steps.

"**Ah, I'm not sure you'd find this too interesting.**" Erratum began to skip past it, but the child smacked their hands against the page to prevent them from turning it. The god gave a soft exhale at their stubbornness, eventually complying as they readjusted the book to continue to read. "**All right, but don't say I didn't warn you.**" They muttered before preparing for the dry spiel that was the list of steps.

"**It is customary for a deity to approach the family of their chosen partner. The being pleads their case to the family, and the family gives their blessing to the courter if they approve.**" They glanced down at Chara, but they were still waiting expectantly for them to continue their reading. The god gave a quiet sigh as they skimmed through the rest of the first step before moving on. "**After approval has been given, the courter presents their chosen partner with a gift that holds a deep meaning to themself and their partner. They declare their intent of courting, and the courtee chooses to either accept or reject.**" They smiled briefly as they thought back on this. "**You know, Reaper did this with Geno. He offered him a very nice flower.**"

Chara blew a raspberry at this, obviously uninterested and even disgusted by the idea.

Erratum laughed softly and continued to read. "**After the intent has been made known, the courter follows a specific set of rituals to bond with their chosen. The first ritual-**"

The god came to a hard stop as they stared down at this book. They recalled helping Reaper crush shells to make the powder for his wings. What troubled them, however, was remembering the gentle lines of golden tracing around heterochromia eye lights.

"**Th...the first ritual involves the courter highlighting their most prominent features with colours and patterns significant and in resemblance of their chosen. Often, this is done with the use of paint or pastes.**" They had that queasy feeling back in their chest, recalling their own patterns and colours. Dream *had* to have known and set them up for this. That didn't mean that Erratum responded any less to the display, however.

They cleared their throat, attempting to move past that. They sighed in relief as the next step seemed irrelevant to them. "**The two partners then engage in a spar between one another. This is a display to each other of the power, determination, and willpower they each hold. The victor does not matter.**" They huffed a small laugh, having wished they could have seen what mess Reaper and Geno's own fight had been like. Nightmare had never fought them after the paint incident had happened. No, they had been more angry and ready to fight Ink than anyone else the next day.

There *was* that chess match, their traitorous brain reminded them. Dream had called it a battle of wits, claiming it was better than an actual sparring match. Nightmare had seemed embarrassed by it but Erratum had thought nothing of it.

They remember how upset they'd been seeing Nightmare avoid his reflection on the way to his office. They had stopped him and forced him to face himself head-on, remembering how they had held the other and watched him take in his new appearance. They really *did* wish the other could see himself as Erratum did, but how did Erratum see him? They weren't so sure now.

Chara gave another smack to the page, showing their impatience at

their stalling. Erratum quickly got back to it, trying to distract themself from these troubling thoughts. "**The courting party brings their partner to meet their prominent family, showing both their family and their partner the strength their bond has grown to. In the case of a deity courting a non-deity, though this bonding is not advised,**" Erratum ignored that bigoted section. "**It includes the introduction of prominent deities of their realm and domain.**"

Did yesterday count? Was that Nightmare's way of showing their long-deceased mother his 'chosen' partner? The more Erratum thought about it, the more certain they were that yes, that was *exactly* what that was.

And Erratum had inadvertently shown Nightmare their own family.

They pushed through the remaining steps, ignoring the throb in their chest as they did so. Nothing else seemed to stick out, aside from perhaps the significant location step but that could have been anything. They were slowly lulled back into a more secure mindset as they continued to read.

Then, they reached the final steps.

"**Each party...**" Erratum trailed off again, much to Chara's visible displeasure. Erratum didn't notice, however, through their own internal crisis. "**Each party marks each other with their magic. Guardians above...**"

Erratum had started this.

They had initiated *all* of this.

Dream's frantic questions made complete sense now when they demanded them to clarify their gift to Nightmare. *Now* the darker spirit's reaction made more sense to them. They must have been completely thrown off guard and confused when they suddenly seemed to initiate something, and so far down in the list as well.

They... were so stupid. The others were right and they *hated* that.

The group had been a little tense the next day when it came time for their group 'session' as they called it.

Many of them voiced their concerns over Erratum's wellbeing, but the other had made no comments to confirm or deny any issues. They had simply been silent through each of their turns to speak, allowing everyone to vent out their deepest frustrations and fears. They knew this entire conflict with Ink had inspired a lot of anxiety and fear from each of their followers.

Geno sighed as he leaned forward a bit once he was done. "Okay... well, this was as depressing as always. I do feel a little better though..." He admitted with a sigh, ready to wrap up this little session.

"Wait,"

Everyone paused, glancing back to the Guardian as they stared pointedly at the ground.

"You... you wanna say something?" Cross approached gently, surprised but hopeful that the other would finally open up in one of these meetings. They watched as the god hesitated momentarily before nodding once more. Everyone sat by quietly, waiting for them to say anything. *Anything* that would let them in on what was going on.

"**I've been not at my best, as I'm sure you've noted. I've been forced to face reality more times than I've wanted in the past few days, and I can't keep pushing it down. Well, I can, and I most likely will, but I want to say something on the matter at least.**" Erratum glanced briefly at all of them before looking down again. "**I guess I can start off by simply saying I miss my home. Now that I remember my brother and his kindness, every part of my soul is screaming in anguish. He didn't deserve to die like that... none of my friends deserved their Fate.**" They sharpened their glare a bit more at the ground.

"***I* didn't deserve it.**"

Cross considered this a small victory. The Guardian was dropping that martyr mask just the tiniest bit to reveal what they truly felt. They had every right to feel that way, but none of them spoke up to say this. They were afraid if anyone else spoke, the other would shut down again.

"**I've pleaded for my old life back. As shameful as that sounds, I've tried to reason with the other Guardians. I even pleaded with them to simply bestow someone else with my purpose, my abilities, and my power. I just... I don't want to do this.**" They admitted, though it pained them to show this side of themself to everyone. "**I hate this 'job' *so* much. I want nothing more than to just... return to my simple life. I don't want followers, or people to respect and love me... I want my home, and that is something I'm never going to be able to achieve.**" They laughed weakly, closing their eyes in anguish. "**I want to give up so *bad,* but I'm not allowed to do that. I'm not allowed to have 'bad days' because**

when I do, the entire multiverse suffers."

The group felt a mixture of pity and surprise at their gutwrenching admittance, but they held their tongues of any comfort. For now.

"**I have many new friends and family now, I know, and I took comfort in that.**" Erratum gave a pained smile as they said this, however. "**So many of you care for me... and I can't stand it.**"

The group seemed stunned once more at these words. "**You don't understand... you don't know what you're setting yourself up for. I didn't think... I never would have imagined I'd get so attached to anyone. I foolishly hoped I could somehow remain neutral and unbothered my entire existence.**" They clenched their fists tightly in their lap. "**But I never stood a chance... not in the face of such kindness, such genuine devotion.**"

"Errata," Blue had started off gently, unable to help it at this point.

"**The worst part,**"

Blue decided to remain silent, seeing the other hadn't gotten all of their heartbreak out there.

"**I started to think it was okay. I thought I was allowed to have this after being alone for so long. I shouldn't have let anyone in... I know what happens in the end. I know... and I can hardly bear it.**" No one seemed to quite understand what they were talking about. "**And Nightmare... I never meant for him to get so close. If I had known things were developing into something so... serious, I would have stepped away. I pulled him in too deep.**" They admitted with a weak sob shaking their body momentarily.

"And he dragged me right down with him..."

Geno blew out a quiet breath at this, admittedly a little relieved despite it all. He gave the other a sympathetic look, his heart going out to the suffering deity. "You love him, Errata." He knew the other didn't want to hear it, but there was no use in them trying to pretend they didn't.

Errata only wept a little harder at this, pressing one hand to their face as they hunch a bit. "**I didn't... I didn't mean to.**"

"We never mean to," Geno muttered, understanding that much, at the very least. "It's not a bad thing, Errata. None of this is bad! You *are* allowed to have a life, have friends, *love.* You don't have to separate yourself from everything around you."

"We all care for you a lot, even if you wish we didn't." Cross smiled weakly, wiping a tear away and sighing shakily. "Geno's right, this isn't a bad thing, Errata. Let yourself have this, for once in your life, be selfish."

"**No... no you don't understand.**" Errata whispered as they continued to silently grieve.

"**It *is* a bad thing. It's... it's absolutely terrible.**"

Chapter End Notes

Eeee I'm so happy to finally drop this here. Hobbytale is a little simplistic universe I made a while back, hinted at briefly in the prologue and then in Waking Nightmare, and of course last chapter.

Feel free to ask questions about this little world because I adore it so much. It's just a cozy little world that brings me so much comfort.

And my bad for the rest of the chapter lmao.

Chapter 36: Ghost of your past

Chapter Summary

> Dream attempts to speak with Nightmare. Nightmare doesn't want to hear it.
>
> He decides to get away from his home for a bit, not knowing what he was walking into.

Chapter Notes

> Hello, it is me again.
>
> I know all of you are really eager to learn more about how the last chapter ended. BUUUUUUT, well, just hold on to those thoughts for a bit.
>
> This scene begins around the same time Errata's "therapy circle" from last chapter begins.
>
> Enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Nightmare was a bit puzzled about how to advance from here.

So far, he had gone through the needed steps a lot smoother than he had thought he would. The other was incredibly receptive as well, which only made it that much easier. Having to sit in front of the mother figure that he himself had killed, whether she was a good one or not, had been difficult. Errata had passed no judgment, however, even going so far as to insist they would have fought had they ever met.

"Idiot," Nightmare breathed quietly with a small smile on his face. He shook his head to dismiss those thoughts, continuing to puzzle a bit on what to do next. He wasn't sure if what happened also counted as a

significant location, but Nightmare was going to rule that it didn't. Errata may blend and skip steps at random but Nightmare was going to try and keep this linear. As he was pondering upon places that actually meant anything to him, he sensed his brother nearby. He turned his head a bit as Dream stepped into his office, looking a little troubled.

"Dream? What's with the unexpected visit?" Nightmare questioned curiously, looking up from his scribbles. He could sense the uneasiness and underlying sadness the other was projecting, instantly sending him into a suspicious mindset. "Is this about Ink? Has he done something else?" He questioned with a tight frown.

"No, no! Nothing like that." Dream assured as he moved closer to his desk, trying to poorly hide his anxiety. "Um... so, what are you doing?" He questioned. Nightmare gave him a strange look at his behaviour, trying to gauge his motive. "Just... just curious." Dream continued after another moment.

Nightmare hated that Dream was trying to start this off casually, as though there wasn't something he was dying to talk about. "Well... we're just looking through our territories at the moment." He explained with a shrug. It wasn't a complete lie, but he didn't want Dream to start suggesting ideas to him about where to take his chosen. Dream seemed to be half paying attention, which only further annoyed the darker twin. "Can you stop pretending like this is a normal conversation and tell us what's the matter?" He tapped his quill impatiently on his desk, tendrils swishing a bit behind him as he waited.

Dream looked up at Nightmare finally, scanning over his face with a frown. "You, uh... you took Errata to the tree, right?" He started, seeing the confused look on his brother's face. "I mean, I *know* you did, you told me." He continued, wringing his hands together nervously. "That puts you... what, halfway through the rituals?" He checked, knowing the answer already. Nightmare seemed to lose some of his suspicion at this, nodding his head.

"That's correct." Nightmare informed as he began looking through his papers again. "We were scouting out territories, actually, to determine-"

"Don't you think you're going a little fast?"

The room fell silent as Nightmare stopped sifting through his papers, taking a moment to consider Dream's words. He looked up at him with bafflement, though Dream was looking to the side and away from him. The darker spirit was stunned by this sudden statement, furrowing his browbones in confusion.

"Wh-?" He sat everything aside and gave Dream his full attention. "What do you mean? You've been the one pushing us the entire time!" He reminded him with a slight glare. "You were supportive up to this point, so what's changed?" He demanded of him, bristling slightly. Dream gave a heavy sigh at Nightmare's obvious displeasure, trying to find a way to go about this.

"Nighty, I..." He clenched his hands together a moment as he fought for words. "I-I just want what's best for you. I don't want you setting yourself up for-"

"For *what,* Dream."

It wasn't a question, but a demand. Nightmare was out of his seat now, leaning over his desk with an obvious hostile air to him. The darker twin couldn't believe what he was hearing. Dream was talking as though he were suddenly uncertain about this entire bonding situation after encouraging Nightmare to follow through with it.

"Nightmare," Dream sighed as he gave him a sad look. Nightmare didn't like his expression, the sympathetic look of apology on his face. It made him feel like there was something else going on that he wasn't aware of. "You *know* I would always support you! Especially with something as wonderful as love and soul-bonding!" He insisted vehemently at the other's betrayed expression.

"We thought you *did!"* Nightmare hissed back at him. "You were the one who told us to keep going! *You* told us that there was something there!"

"I know... and I'm so sorry..."

Nightmare felt chilled by this, feeling the waves of guilt and regret rolling off the positive spirit. The implications of that...

"We... I-I don't..." Nightmare stammered a moment, glancing him up and down. "What are you trying to say?" He watched his brother turn his head away from him again, sorrow continuing to dominate his expression. "You don't know what you're talking about." He immediately denied, tendrils rearing up at him threateningly. Dream gave him another pitying look, which only seemed to further fuel his anger.

"Please, Nighty... you know what I'm saying. Don't make me go into detail..." Dream begged him, though it only seemed to send him even more on the defense.

"Is this some sort of sick game? Is it because you can't have the same thing with *Ink?"*

Dream flinched noticeably at this, a frown sharpening his features. "That isn't what this is about, Nightmare. I'm not so cruel as to do such

a thing!" He shot back with irritation. "Nightmare I'm sorry things are like this, I really am! But-"

"No!" Nightmare hissed at him, narrowing his eyes as he pushed himself away from his desk. "We don't know what has gotten into you, but you're wrong. Whatever you're thinking, you're *wrong.*" He insisted on Dream's certainty. "You haven't *seen* them like we have, Dream. I don't *care* what you heard or saw, you weren't... you weren't there through it all. You haven't seen how they've been with me, what they've done..."

"Nighty," Dream gave him a tearful look, to which Nightmare turned away from sharply. "Nighty I *know* it hurts but-"

"Shut up!" Nightmare growled as the negativity encroached further up his face and down across his neck and clavicle. "You know *nothing,* Dream." He wasn't going to sit here and listen to this nonsense any longer. He quickly disappeared in a puff of violet magic, leaving Dream behind in his office.

Dream gave a heavy sigh as the other retreated, knowing he needed some time to think about everything.

Nightmare landed in the middle of a rocky surrounding, uncertain where exactly he had warped to in his desperation to get away. He wasn't focused on figuring it out, however, only on trying to sort through his racing thoughts. Dream had spoken so certainly and it was shaking Nightmare's foundation a bit. He had talked so sympathetically, as though Errata-

No, that couldn't be it. Nightmare *knew* that couldn't be it. He had felt the small fleeting sensations of their emotions the rare moments they let them out; when their guard was lowered enough. He *knows* he felt that warm sting of affection, he knows the fond looks and subtle gestures so personally. It was everything he had always wished he could experience as a negative being but had long given up on.

Dream didn't know, he didn't see what Nightmare saw.

Nightmare froze as he heard a distinct sound of bubbling nearby. By the time he had turned around to confront it, however, a shape had already begun to form out of it. The negativity on his skull began to recede back a moment at Nightmare's command, attempting to appear as harmless as possible. He didn't have much Hope of it working, but it was worth a shot. Soon, he was face-to-face with a rather startled-looking Ink. Nightmare couldn't feel much coming from the artist, but he judged his thoughts based on the expressions on his face and the shifting lights in his eyes.

Ink looked as though he'd seen a ghost, frozen in place as he looked the spirit up and down. "N...Nightmare?" He breathed out softly, in complete disbelief. The spirit looked almost as he had before everything went to hell. He still had traces of the corruption over his body, and he was taller and dressed more elegantly, but it was definitely Nightmare. It was definitely the Nightmare he had crafted. "How-"

"How do you think?" Nightmare shot back, still guarded as Ink's expression shifted a bit until it landed on something sourer.

"Errata, then..."

Nightmare could feel the disdain in the words, even if the emotions behind them were fake. Still, his tendrils reared up a bit at his tone

with obvious displeasure. "Yeah, they were pretty persistent about 'fixing' us, so to say." He air-quoted, knowing it was less *fixing* and more *stabilizing*.

Ink was silent at this, browbones raising a bit with interest. Nightmare thought he caught the briefest blip of some sort of emotion, but dismissed it as his own anxiety.

"So," Ink started as his posture shifted from a lax position to a more offensive one. "You must mean a lot to them then, huh?"

Nightmare's soul pounded a bit at how this was worded, alarm bells ringing in his mind. His talk with Dream made him momentarily doubt this, but he wasn't certain in the first place what he meant to the Guardian anymore. "What are you implying?" He demanded as his body tensed a bit. Ink didn't respond, however, as he leaned against his brush.

"Still out there spreading negativity then?"

"Of course, as much as the balance-" Nightmare was cut off by a long-suffering sigh, Ink having leaned his head back with exasperation.

"Not this balance crap again..." Ink grumbled as he glanced over Nightmare again. "So you're with them then. You're standing behind this propaganda of balance nonsense. It's not surprising Errata would side with someone like *you* to meet their end goal." He commented while the darker spirit bristled more.

"Don't disrespect them, you lowly demigod."

Ink grinned a bit more at this, seeming satisfied somehow in his words. "Oh yeah, you definitely mean something to them." He remarked as he swung his brush up again into an offensive position. "That's really convenient! I have a hard time pinning them down to actually cause any damage since the last time we fought." He took a step forward, causing Nightmare to take a step back.

"But,"

Ink uncorked a red vial from his sash, seeming rather pleased. "I don't have to hurt *them* to *hurt* them... if you know what I mean." He shrugged, not waiting for the other to reply. Nightmare tensed as the artist completely emptied the vial in one gulp, sending a heavy sense of dread to his soul. It took a few moments before Ink's eyelights flashed a bright red and retained a threatening shape. It was clear to Nightmare now that Ink had the means to hurt Errata by hurting *him*.

"Shit..!"

Nightmare barely avoided the first slashing of red paint, eyes wide as he stared at the irate creator. There was no getting out of this confrontation, but honestly, Nightmare didn't think he wanted to. Not after everything he had done. The dark spirit narrowed his eyes as violet magic twinned around his hands, summoning a larger staff with a sickle-shaped crescent moon at the top. A dark purple amethyst sat near the bottom of the blade, acting as his magic focus.

"All right then, have it your way. We've been wanting to do this for a while." Nightmare growled as the blade lit up a bright violet colour as well. He waited until Ink launched at him, timing it perfectly before he swung the sharp sickle around. The magic arched in a sharp slash, racing toward Ink's moving form. The creator seemed to be expecting a melee parry and thus was unprepared when the flood of negative energy assaulted his system. The artist tripped up as a burning sensation filled his body, wincing as his strike became sloppy and easy for Nightmare to dodge.

"We Hope you weren't expecting this to be a fair fight," Nightmare chuckled at the outraged look in the other's target eyelights. "Come on, Ink, you know that's not our style." He grinned. Ink felt tapping in the forefront of his mind, a presence trying to dig its way in. The artist resisted with a sharp jerk of his head, breaking eye contact with Nightmare. The spirit took that moment to advance back on him, catching him in the grip of his blade before launching him a safe distance away. Ink managed to skid to a halt rather quickly, jaw clenched tightly as his artificial rage only grew wilder. Nightmare was aiming to keep him as far back as possible; he was built for more ranged attacks though he did have some close combat abilities at the ready. He knew he wasn't as durable with his newer body, however, as he had been covered in corruption.

Ink vanished into a puddle of black ink, removing himself from Nightmare's line of sight. The negative spirit cursed the other's lack of emotions, making it hard to detect him if he decided to pop back up. He continued to whip his head around every few seconds, trying to gauge where the other might appear. He jerked his head back as Ink collided with him, knocking him down onto his back with a harsh swipe of his legs. Nightmare held his staff between both hands, cringing as he deflected a harsh blow from the brush once more. He jolted as a series of ebony tendrils erupted from the ground around him, encircling Ink's legs and dragging him down roughly. Nightmare managed to scramble backward as the tendrils restrained the artist, though Nightmare knew it wouldn't hold long.

"Thanks," Nightmare sighed as the inky appendages on his back sharpened and flailed threateningly. Nightmare could tell the corruption wanted control again, but he had to continue resisting its compulsion. He was only a little banged up and he could hold his own at the moment. It didn't seem to think so, but Nightmare was more focused on Ink as he sliced away the ebony tendrils with a wave of paint. He was quickly back on his feet, swirling a mixture of dark paint in the air with graceful movements of his hands. The dark spirit gasped as it suddenly spiked forward, lashing out and slicing through the side of Nightmare's cloak. The spirit moved one hand from his staff to his side, pressing against the stinging wound with a cringe. He jerked his head to the side as he narrowly avoided another lash of

paint to his head, soul thumping loudly at the near miss.

"How do you stop a rage-boosted maniac??" Nightmare tried to think back to different ways others attempted to stop himself in his bad days. He lashed out another psychic spike of magic as the other approached again, able to continuously slow him down with each strike to his mind. Despite the obvious pain, however, the artist never stopped coming for him. Nightmare was forced to keep falling back, attempting to remain on his feet and walk backward while simultaneously returning blows with powerful magic. He finally lost his balance a moment, stumbling backward enough for Ink to take advantage of the moment.

The slather of paint seared his entire front, causing him to fall back completely. The dark spirit arched back and gave a piercing scream, a staticky wave of agitated magic exploding outward. Ink clutched the sides of his head as it washed over him, dropping to his own knees as it shredded through his mind violently. Nightmare couldn't find it in him to move, his front burning with the caustic paint and his staff vanishing.

His breath hitched as he felt the bubbling of negativity spreading rapidly over him once more, causing him to grip the side of his face. "W-Wait! Stop-!" He pleaded as it coated the entire right side of his body, barely leaving his left eye uncovered.

"No, you had your chance." Nightmare's voice was that darker, deeper tone it had been before his neutralization. He directed his attention back to Ink, a murderous glare in his eyes. The artist was stumbling up to his feet, appearing to be dazed by the harsh magical attack. "Now, allow me to return the favour." Nightmare grinned as he played with the newer, more lively magic that ran through his body. He reared his tendrils and swiped one hand out, a thick toxic substance swelling and submerging the artist. Ink was far too off-balance to dodge, giving a shriek as the acidic mixture ate through the top of his shirt. The artist scraped it off in painful movements, locking eyes on Nightmare's more familiar form.

Ink didn't say anything, seemingly still too far gone, as he disappeared once more. Nightmare kept himself alert, tendrils swishing as they attempted to sense which direction he would come from. One tendril shot out as the artist appeared, grabbing Nightmare's attention as Ink slashed through it with another arc of paint. The spirit hissed at the burning feeling, grunting as Ink formed a few inky bones out of the splatter below them and impaled one into his shoulder. His hand shot out to grasp the creator's wrist, black magic racing up his arm and causing the raging monster to waver as it sapped the energy out of him. His brush suddenly felt heavy in his arms rather than the versatile weapon it always seemed to be. The 'attack' didn't seem to actually hurt him, but it definitely made his body feel at half capacity. Nightmare took this moment of wavering strength to pierce through his mind again, sifting through his nightmares and fears until he came across something useful.

Ink suddenly found himself surrounded on all sides in a white space. The artist twisted around with wide eyes, unable to find anything other than blank white all around him. His breathing picked up a bit as he heard the dark cackles of Nightmare around him, the only break in the endless void. Ink hunched over and vomited a dark sludge of ink, trembling a bit as his mind eased from the expulsion of some excess paint. The blinding rage was replaced by a bit more rationality, causing him to consider his current situation. The dark stain on the ground was grounding, a different colour than the nauseating white. Nightmare was powerful, but he certainly wasn't powerful enough to transport him anywhere either than his own mind. With this knowledge, he was able to strike out against the mental barrier, shattering the illusion around him.

Nightmare seemed surprised by this as Ink knocked him back with a harsh hit of his brush. The spirit grunted as he landed on his front, panting heavily as his body screamed in protest. He was using so much magic so quickly, leaving him drained. The dark corruption receded back again, leaving the more vulnerable skeleton back in control of his body.

Shit, shit, Dream! Dream we need assistance!

His first instinct was to call out over their connection, though he was annoyed with himself immediately after. Why did he do that? That was only going to cause more issues! Dream would be so torn over this and try to uselessly talk both of them down.

Then, he remembered.

He turned himself over onto his side, managing to grasp his opposite wrist with his hand with a shaky sigh. It took him a moment to work his fingers under the golden bracelet but once he had, he curled them around it tightly and pulled. He was careful not to accidentally snap it, but it was hard enough to hopefully convey his desperation to the other.

"Wow," Ink was panting as well, wiping the side of his mouth to clean away some of the black stains. "I gotta admit, you're tough, Nightmare. Your magic is definitely no joke! It's too bad you had to find yourself on the opposite side of me." He frowned a bit as he looked him over, considering what to do with him. He tensed, however, as a more volatile and prickling magic sensation lit up around him. "Oh... well, that's probably not good."

Nightmare glanced up as someone dropped down in front of him, able to make out a familiar dark fabric. He winced as he gripped the edge of the robe, drawing the Guardian's attention to him immediately. "Hey... uh, so we might have an issue."

"You think??" Errata gaped at his current state, seeing how bloodied and wounded he clearly was. Errata turned his head as Dream suddenly appeared, an alarmed look on his face as he searched the area. He gasped as he noticed his crumpled brother, glancing at Ink with wide eyes.

"Ink! Why would you-?!"

"So you *knew!"* Ink cut him off with a scowl. "You *knew* Nightmare was like this and you said *nothing!"* He was outraged that Dream had kept something so significant hidden from him. "What else have you been hiding from me?!"

"Ink, *stop!* I didn't say anything because *this,"* Dream gestured to his wounded brother, tears in his eyes. "Is how you react! He isn't some mindless entity corrupting worlds anymore, Ink! Not that he was mindless before but, that's an entirely different story I'm not getting into!" He approached him with a desperate look in his eyes. "Stop, please! You've... you've already done enough, okay? He's so hurt..."

Ink didn't seem to care as he stared past him toward the Guardian and their spirit, the tip of his paintbrush saturating again. Dream seemed to notice, grasping onto Ink's forearm tightly in fear.

"Ink, don't-!"

Dream gasped as Ink's opposite arm whipped around, sharply backhanding him and knocking him to the ground. The positive spirit held the side of his face, eyes wide as Ink was suddenly pointing his dripping brush threateningly at him. "I..Ink... w-what are you?" His voice was trembling, seeing the eyelights flickering from pinpricks of white to swirling colours again.

"You two never came out quite right anyway."

Dream tensed at this statement, hardly recognizing Ink's voice as he spoke. Ink was giving him a hard look, however, seeming to consider

something.

"We could always make better versions of you. Ones that don't defy me or go off their stories."

"S-Stop! Ink! I-I know that's not how *you* feel!" Dream pleaded with him, giving a sharp cry as a few drops of caustic paint fell onto his face. Ink didn't appear to react much to him as he pulled his brush up, preparing it for a devastating strike.

"You're in our way."

Dream watched with wide eyes as Ink brought his brush up, everything seeming to move in slow motion. The artist went rigid, however, as a sharp sound of metal colliding with a solid object rang through the air. Ink crumpled forward moments later, discarding his brush as his hands came to wrap around the back of his head.

"Bro, you *really* did not pass that vibe check."

Dream breathed out a heavy sigh of relief as Fresh pulled his bat back up to rest on his shoulder, his shades displaying 'VIBE CHECK' on them. "You good, my dude?" Fresh checked, toeing the downed Ink a moment to gauge how long he'd be dazed.

"Y..Yeah, I'm ok." Dream managed as he backed up. Errata was staring at the duo from afar, helping Nightmare to stand and recover his faculties. The positive spirit winced as he rubbed his face, quickly making his way over to the both of them. The Guardian nodded once before going off to join Fresh a moment later. Dream fed a bit of his healing magic into Nightmare, watching as he cringed from the

positive magic. "I know, just... you need a little at least." He encouraged him to push through it. After he deemed him stable enough, he allowed Nightmare to step back to regain himself.

"Nightmare."

The dark spirit glanced up at his twin's call. Dream appeared to be clearly upset, the frown firm on his face. His hands began to glow a bright yellow, clenching together as they came to rest on his chest. His eyes were burning the same bright colour, causing Nightmare to jolt.

"Are... you sure?" Nightmare checked, surprised by the intentions the other had. Dream seemed unmoved, however, and Nightmare nodded once in understanding. "Okay..." He muttered as he resummoned his staff once more.

Errata had pulled Fresh back, questioning him on how he found the lot of them. The parasite had given an unhelpful shrug, only dropping his playful demeanour when Ink pushed himself back up to his feet. The Guardian and parasite both kept their guards up as he gripped his brush, barely standing at this point. His body was sore, but his *mind* was completely battered and torn apart from the onslaught of Nightmare's magic in combination with the harsh blow to his skull.

Ink gave a shout as he reared his brush up again, only to freeze in place. He collapsed down onto his hands and knees again, vomiting a disgusting mixture of colours onto the ground. Errata stared on with confusion until they felt a harsh battering of negativity against their person. Ink seemed to be cringing as bright yellow magic kept him ensnared. Errata turned their head back in the direction of the twins, startled at the sight.

Dream had his eyes squeezed shut, hands held tightly to his chest as he siphoned magic away from Ink from a distance. Nightmare had his

staff raised, eyes glowing as it pulsed out dark, nearly black waves of magic every few seconds in rhythm. Errata was fascinated to see them manipulate the artist's artificial emotions, admiring how powerful they were to be able to do so.

Ink was left with no joy, no positivity, and only negative paints saturating his system. His anxiety and anguish overpowered the rest of his senses, and he had the crushing feeling that he'd never experience happiness again. Eventually, the sensation was too much for him to continue to endure. The creator sunk away in a vat of ink, finally disappearing for good this time. The twin spirits' magic died away soon after, leaving the area less suffocating with magic.

"I...I never wanted to have to do that." Dream breathed as he looked at his own hands. "I never... I never wanted to use this power..." He looked to Nightmare, who placed a comforting hand on his back. "Nighty, I-"

"No, no you made the right call." Nightmare assured with a small nod. "He was either going to keep going until he killed someone or himself. He... fuck, Dream-" He winced, muttering an apology as Errata approached. "He *actually* almost killed you... right *in front of us."* He emphasized to the bright spirit. "How can you... how can you let him treat you like that?" He demanded gently, baffled by his tolerance. Nightmare knew that Ink was half out of his mind from his condition, but for Dream to just stay and live in that unpredictable environment?

"You know what it's like, Nighty." Dream whispered tearfully. "You know how painful it can be to love someone..."

Nightmare exhaled heavily as Dream withdrew away from him, leaving him feeling somehow sympathetic and annoyed all at once. He redirected his attention upward as Errata clasped the sides of his face in either hand. He huffed out a soft laugh as the other turned his head side to side, examining the leftover damage. "Relax, we're still in one piece."

"Why did you wait so *long* to call?!" Errata demanded of him, eyes wide and worried as they traced some of the cracks in his skull. Nightmare only gave them a pained grin, much to Errata's mounting exasperation.

"We were doing pretty good for a while, to be fair." Nightmare replied. "Are *you* giving *us* grief over waiting until the last minute to call for help?" He snorted at the idea, finding the entire thing to be incredibly hypocritical.

"You do as I say and not as I do!"

Nightmare only laughed further at this absurd notion. "You're so ridiculous," He commented on their behaviour. He gave a soft noise as he was pulled in closer and carefully held by the Guardian. "Ah, we're sorry, we know. It's fine, we're alive." He assured them. "He's not gonna bring us down anytime soon." He could practically feel the tension in the silence that followed this, making him wonder what was going through the Guardian's mind.

Dream watched curiously as Errata pulled back from the hold, giving him an exasperated look at his audacity. Nightmare only gave them a weak grin as the god pressed their forehead to the top of his head, a relieved sigh leaving their body. Dream was acutely aware of the momentary pulse of affection, guilt, and desperate resolve the Guardian exhibited. He tilted his head the slightest bit, giving a faint hum of surprise. "Huh... well, maybe I really *don't* know anything." He muttered at their obvious gentle affections, frowning as he rubbed the side of his face.

He definitely wasn't someone to go to for healthy relationship advice, after all.

Chapter End Notes

I can't even count the number of dnd spells Nightmare used here lmao.

The switches in the beginning and when Nightmare is overrun by corruption from us/we to I/Me is very intentional, btw's

But! Finally the introduction of Dream and Nightmare's emotional manipulation abilities! I had mentioned quite a few chapters back some outlined rules and laws for the deities, one being this ability. Dream never used it as it was seen as a perversion of emotional balance and Nightmare couldn't have cared less back then.

Gosh I love the idea of it. Anyway, whoops! More sad and Dev STILL can't write a fight scene afdsgh.

Chapter 37: Martyrize

Chapter Summary

Erratum is trying to clean up the mess from Nightmare's ambush while wrestling with their own quiet resolve.

Chapter Notes

Hello once more, it me. I Hope you all know we are rather close to the end now. Take that as ominously as you'd please.

https://www.deviantart.com/vcl2006/art/Star-927338690
Once again, VCL, making some lovely art. The touches of exhaustion on Erratum's face is just. Everything about this is perfect.

Be sure to stick around to the end notes for something a little... SPECIAL.

Enjoy

See the end of the chapter for more notes

To say Erratum was significantly shaken up the remainder of the day would be underselling it. Their mind had been filled with too much all at once, all unsettling and foreboding pieces of information they had to deal with. Nightmare's affections, *Erratum's* affections, Ink's loss of control to the muses, Nightmare and Dream's near-fatal encounter, and the jarring resolve it brought them to.

Or rather, the confirmation that set everything in stone.

Cross had even gone a little easy on them regarding their quick disappearance into potential danger again. The moment the god felt the desperate pull of their magic from Nightmare they had near instantaneously vanished, much like a reflex. The sight of

how *battered* he'd been, running low on magic and corruption dripping down his face, was still burned into their mind.

This is what happens to gods like us when we hesitate.

Erratum was staring down into the malformed shape that was Ink's 'soul', settled at the base of their altar as they considered it. A few darker ideas were whispering in their mind as they kept their hold on it gentle, having to keep themself in check while doing so. The slightly heart-shaped object sat, harmlessly floating in place, mocking them. This singular object was the source of every bit of conflict and agony they had been put through, both in this life and their last. They had moved past the 'don't be bitter' motto to 'be rational' instead. They had a right to be bitter and upset despite it all, but only if they remained rational about how they went about it.

Their hard musings over this object were interrupted by Verse appearing in front of them, displaying a phone icon with Dream's face to them. The Guardian gave a confused expression to the console before running their hand over the screen. It enlargened the slightest bit before connecting, leaving them further confused when they spotted Nightmare instead. "**Nightmare? What-**"

"Listen," Nightmare cut them off, looking exhausted and still freshly wounded from earlier's fight. "We need your assistance with something. *Immediately, please."* The tone was pleading but not desperate; Erratum had become quite skilled in picking out the differences. The god could only nod their agreement, seeing him heave a relieved sigh at their compliance. "Great, knew we could count on you."

Erratum gave a faint smile despite their mood. "**Of course you can, Nightlight.**" They breathed a quiet laugh as they were immediately hung up on in response. Their smile turned slightly wistful before they steeled themself again, creating a rift for them to travel through. They weren't too surprised to find themself in his manor once more, but

they were a little surprised to be standing in the main lounge with Dream and Nightmare.

Or more specifically, with Nightmare leaning against the armrest of the couch, tendril wrapped around a box of tissues while Dream wept beside him.

Nightmare spotted them immediately, head raising from its position resting on his palm. "Oh thank the Guardians..." He muttered as the Guardian gave him a bizarre look. One of his tendrils clumsily dabbed at Dream's face, or at least what it could reach with the spirit's face buried in his hands. "Errata, please, we're a being of negativity but this goes outside of even our realm of knowledge." He pleaded with them. Erratum glanced between the two a moment, a little startled at being thrown into something so emotionally charged so suddenly.

"What do you want *me* to do?"

"We don't know!" Nightmare sputtered a bit at the accusatory question. "You're better at comforting others than we are, Errata. The direct approach is not working here." He insisted, narrowing his eyes a bit at the quiet laugh it earned.

"I'm flattered," Erratum insisted with a small smile. **"May I ask what it is you're talking about?"** They prompted, seeing how distressed the positive spirit seemed to be.

"Dream agreed to stay here for an extended period of time to recoup from everything. There's no way he's going straight back to Ink after everything that happened today." He punctuated this with a small glare at his twin. "We told him to just give up on the guy because he's obviously not getting better and," He winced at the quiet sob it was returned with. "*This,"*

This indeed.

Erratum gave the spirit an exasperated expression, shaking their head a bit. "**Night, you are wonderfully intelligent and empathetic... *most* of the time.**" They sighed with a tired smile on their face. Nightmare seemed to take offense to that, his free tendrils rearing up in retaliation. "**Don't give me all that. Some of these things require a, well,**" They moved closer to the couch they were lounging on, running a hand over an irritated tendril to relax it. "**Gentler touch.**"

Nightmare grumbled quietly at this, his pride too high to admit to something like that. "Regardless, we would appreciate it if you would take the reigns here- that means to take over, before you ask," He immediately spoke, watching the question begin to form on the other's tongue. Erratum huffed out an amused sound at his insight, allowing him to continue. "We still have a few things to do and we promised Horror we'd assist him in the kitchen. Guardians forbid we go back on such a promise." He sighed as he seemed to envision it.

Erratum gave him a fond look as he explained, nodding once in agreement. "**Do what you need to do, I will be here.**" They assured as they settled against the couch after the darker spirit got to his feet. Nightmare gave them a grateful look at their compliance, obviously relieved to have one problem being taken care of. The god looked up curiously as the dark spirit stepped closer again, seeming to scan their expression for a moment. Erratum tilted their head down the slightest bit as they briefly met foreheads, a gesture that seemed painfully affectionate in their soul.

"Find us later, okay? There's something we'd like to talk about." Nightmare spoke in a hushed voice, as though it were a secret. He pulled back again a moment later, tendrils swaying their farewell as he headed into the kitchen in a near speedwalk. Erratum released the breath they didn't realize they were holding, ignoring the agony in their soul. A small noise beside them reminded them of Dream's

presence, said spirit staring off with a watery smile.

"You big liar," He started, earning Erratum's immediate confusion. "You said you didn't love him..."

"I said I didn't want *him* to love me."

Dream frowned a bit at the clarification, turning his head to look at them. The god was reserved as ever, keeping a tight seal on any emotion that might have been telling. "I don't understand... you're both so happy together. Why wouldn't you...?" He couldn't understand what Erratum was talking about; they loved Nightmare but they didn't want *Nightmare* to return that? "You're... so strange, but this is a whole new level." He informed them, though it didn't get the amused exasperation it normally would provoke. "Why would that matter? Why is okay for you to-"

"It is easier this way."

Dream was becoming a little frustrated with their indirect answers. "Errata you keep saying things like that but it doesn't make anything any clearer." He turned his body a bit to better look at them, a few balled-up tissues falling to the floor.

"What does it feel like?" Erratum questioned instead, staring off quietly without actually turning to meet his eye.

Dream blinked a few times at the sudden question, confused by the direction they were driving the conversation. "I don't... what does *what* feel like?"

"To lose someone you love to self-destruction?"

The question hit hard for Dream, having experienced these things both with Nightmare and Ink now. "I... I mean, it's painful. That... but that doesn't mean that person is irredeemable, that much we've already proven." The spirit insisted, feeling as though *he* were suddenly the one doing the comforting. The Guardian smiled a bit, as though sensing that themself.

"That is true," They replied quietly, causing the bright spirit to puff up a bit at their acceptance. **"How are you doing with all of that?"** The spirit deflated once more as the topic redirected back to the real problem at hand.

"I'm..." Dream trailed off a moment, knowing it would be pointless to try and talk around the topic and insist he was okay. The god could out-patience him any day of the week, that was for sure. "Well... I mean, I'm not *great,* yeah..." He relented, seeing the slight satisfaction in the other's expression at his honesty. "It isn't even the threat against my life-"

"A fact that I'm, admittedly, a little concerned over your indifference toward."

"It's seeing him go from some form of a personality, almost like he's actually *experiencing* something, to..." Dream moved the tissue in his hand to wipe his face again. "This... unfeeling vessel something else is using as a conduit." He sounded bitter as he said this, clenching his hand a bit as he balled up the tissue. "I hate the Muses..." He muttered, tensing a bit after a moment.

"You're allowed to feel that way." Erratum assured at the way he froze at this strong negative declaration. **"You *are* allowed to feel negative feelings, Dream. If Nightmare can be allowed to**

experience positivity, surely that means the inverse for you." They reminded him with a pointed look. Dream sighed at this, unable to argue that too much. "**I know it's hard considering you were always told to believe the opposite.**"

"You'd think I'd be over it by now." Dream hated that this had to be something unconditioned from his mind. "I have Nightmare back, everything is finally in balance with our domain... but I still can't push past it." He sighed, frustrated by his own hangups. "I want to be strong like Nightmare and just keep moving forward. I was never good at that though; I was always controlled by my own emotions."

Erratum watched him struggle with his frustrations as he spoke, the internal battle clear on his face. The god placed a hand on the top of his head, causing Dream to halt his outward spiral into near self-hatred. "**Nightmare has his own hangups as well. No one is able to simply snap back into a role after eons of working against the other half of your domain. It takes time and patience, and the same goes for lingering trauma responses.**" They gave him a knowing look, causing Dream to shy away a bit. The spirit held his own tongue at the other's hypocrisy on trauma responses.

"I know it's not reasonable to think everything should be better instantly, but I sure want it to be." Dream near pouted as he tucked his knees to his chest, resting his feet on Nightmare's precious leather couch as he did so. "I'm worried it's too late to fix any of this." He continued after a moment. "That there's no way to stop Ink from completely losing control. It seems like we're running out of time to reverse this."

"**We are cutting it close, absolutely,**" Erratum agreed with his fears, frowning in thought. "**He's not going to lose control.**" Dream gave them a look at this, frowning at this seemingly empty promise. The god didn't normally offer such empty words to any of them.

"You can't possibly know that." Dream muttered bitterly.

"**I understand your doubts,**" Erratum insisted, seeing how the other was ruffled by their blatant statement. "**However, this... this is one thing I can say with absolute certainty.**" They wove a few strings between their hands, focusing on that rather than their thoughts. Dream watched them with interest, irritation fading at the determination in their voice. He didn't know what the other was thinking, but it was clear they still had some Hope for turning things around.

They both sat there a moment in silence, wrestling over their own individual internal conflicts. Dream glanced over to the god after another moment, gathering up a bit of courage to address something that had been on his mind. He didn't want to tread too far into potentially dangerous territory, but he needed some answers.

"Hey, Errata?"

The god hummed a bit in acknowledgment, continuing to toy with the threads around their fingers. Dream hesitated again, sensing the other was already rather stressed from their earlier conversation. He kept pressing forward, however, needing to know. "Back at what was left at the tree of feelings," He started, hands beginning to wring themselves together anxiously. "When... when we changed Nightmare back to what he is now..." He gauged the other's reaction, but they seemed to still be quietly listening to him.

"Did... did you *really* have that betrayal move planned the entire time for me to take that shot?" He could see their hands pause their work, signaling to him Erratum knew what he was hinting at. "Or... did you actually... really think about..." He trailed off, not wanting to directly reference it. He could still remember the terror and feelings of betrayal watching the Guardian walk across the field to Nightmare's side.

Erratum was unsettlingly silent, dismissing the strings from their hands as the idle fidgeting no longer kept their mind occupied. Not with a question like that hanging in the air.

There was that fear of us again, clear in their voice.

Dream frowned as they were met with silence, wondering what the other was constructing to say. Before he could open his mouth to question them, however, their head popped up in a confused 'listening' head tilt. The spirit sighed heavily, knowing that the conversation was officially over; the god would always answer calls first, especially if it got them out of an uncomfortable situation. Dream looked over in confusion, however, as Nightmare popped his own head out from the connecting dining room with a similar intense expression on his face.

"Nighty? What's-"

"Are you able to hear them?" Erratum questioned with surprise at Nightmare's obvious intuition regarding the members of his home.

"Not exactly," Nightmare replied as he stepped out and faced the grand stairs. "Their distress transfers from their souls to ours," He explained, much to Erratum's interest. "We know, horrifically sentimental of us." He drawled as Erratum quickly joined his side. "Both of them are in distress, however," He seemed torn by this matter, but Erratum rested a hand against his shoulder in reassurance. Nightmare glanced up at them, expecting them to have a solution.

"Killer's issue is something only I can deal with. You take the other and I'll check in after everything has resolved on my end." The god instructed him, to which Nightmare sighed and nodded in agreement. **"Good, hopefully, I can catch this quick enough to get it under control. Call for me if you need assistance."** They gave Nightmare a look at this, obviously distrusting him after today's

events. Nightmare merely rolled his eyes and waved them off entirely. Both deities broke away from one another, Nightmare vanishing in a puff of violet magic while Erratum pixelated through the environment instead.

Dream sighed a bit with a weak smile. "I really Hope they figure themselves out. They act and work around each other like they've been bonded for decades."

Killer felt the heavy sensation in his soul grow, causing him to curl in on his side. He had gone to lie back in his bed until Horror ultimately called for dinner, a tight sensation in his chest that made it hard to breathe driving him from his normal routine. It had taken him a bit to realize this was building up into one of those magic storms, and he had reflexively called out the moment it dawned on him. Normally he would be reluctant at *best* to lower his pride enough to call for the Guardian, but last time had been a shitty experience. He would be lying if he said he wasn't just a *little* afraid of getting that bad again.

He glanced up as someone passed entirely through his door, leaving him to furrow his brows in confusion. The thick hatred was already streaming from his eyes again, making it harder to see. "Did you just noclip through my door?" He questioned the god as their body solidified from its fuzzy pixelated state. The god shook themself out a bit as they regathered themself, focusing on Killer with an intense expression.

"**Sort of,**" Erratum offered as they settled on the bed with the wary skeleton. "**I can pass through solid objects by sort of glitching through the environment.**" They explained, not giving the other a warning before their threads slid through his chest and retrieved his

soul. The monster jolted immediately at the unexpected contact, body tense. **"Sorry, I'm trying to be quick to keep it from getting too bad."**

Killer gave them a dirty look for the spook, but he had to admit it wasn't as bad as he thought it would be. When Erratum first grabbed his soul in their first encounter, it burned and ached like nothing he had ever experienced before. Now, it was a soft, warm sensation against the core of his being. Rather than feeling like the target of a hostile attack, he felt like the recipient of a protective embrace. "Warn a guy next time." He grunted as he watched them engulf his soul in a golden light. The god simply hummed, neither agreeing nor disagreeing with his request. Killer gave a relieved sigh as the surrounding foreign magic seemed to take the edge off the tight sensation.

"Was this seemingly random? Or were you doing something when it started?" Erratum questioned, though their eyes stayed focused on where they encased his soul. Their concentration wasn't too strained this time, the fuel behind their positive energy still fresh in their mind. Killer scowled a bit at the question, seeming frustrated himself over the matter.

"I was messin' with Dreamsicle downstairs until Nightmare came and shooed me off. I was gonna go bug Dust next but then I started getting that tight feeling in my chest. Thought it was just some emotional crap I'm not used to yet and came to lie down for a bit." Killer explained, sighing with obvious irritation at his situation. "Nightmare said this might be a permanent thing?" He checked, slightly fearful of the answer.

Erratum gave him an apologetic look at this. **"I'm afraid so, at least until we can find a solution. I know it isn't ideal, but at least we have a way to maintain it."** They reassured him, though it didn't seem to do much for his disappointed rage.

"This is your fault ya know," Killer's growled remark caused the god to raise a browbone in response, an amused huff leaving them quietly. "Cause you had to go and 'fix' my soul-"

"You're the one-"

"I asked for it to be back in my body, not back to normal!" Killer snapped as the other began to remind him that *he* called for them. Well, he did at Nightmare's request, at least. Neither he nor the spirit had been expecting the ultimate outcome of the situation. "This shit sucks. I used to be unstoppable, Nightmare's righthand man." He ranted.

"Are you not now?" Erratum questioned curiously, wanting to hear his thoughts on his condition and visualized limitations. **"I don't recall Nightmare ever saying differently about you."**

Killer scrunched his nasal bridge at this. "I could still wreck your shit, don't get me wrong," He ignored the amused chuckle that earned. "Just hard not to feel inadequate." The understanding hum still irritated him, hating that he felt like some child spilling their woes. "What's up with you and Boss anyway?" He redirected, grinning a bit at the slight stutter in the other's magic. "Hah, finally gotcha on something." He preened at faltering their normal calm front.

"Nothing that you should concern yourself with." Erratum replied as they slowly withdrew their magic again, appraising the stability of the soul. **"I'm glad you called me before it got too bad. This saves you the suffering and me the magic."** They hummed as they watched the red-tinged soul relax its irritation from overflow. **"I would still suggest you lie down for a bit. I'll pass on your status to the others."** They informed as the soul slotted back into place.

Killer gave a relieved sigh as their head thumped back on the pillow.

He wrinkled his nasal bridge again at the feeling of pressure against his face. He opened one eye, irritated that the other was still disturbing him. "What're you doing?" He grumped, trying to turn his head away.

"You're getting this stuff everywhere." Erratum replied, using a handkerchief they had pulled from seemingly nowhere to wipe at the side of his face. **"Though I think your pillowcase is a lost cause."** They mused at the stained white object. Killer hissed and swiped at them, flushing the faintest bit with humiliation.

"I can clean my own face! Go!" Killer demanded as he snatched the cloth from their hand. Erratum didn't retaliate, simply shrugging their shoulders before rising from the bed. The irritated monster watched them walked back to his door, taking a moment to look back over him before exiting and shutting his door. Killer sighed in relief, moving to strip the pillowcase off of his pillow to check how much seeped through. "Ugh... like we needed *two* overbearing deities in the house..."

Erratum moved down the hallway, easily able to locate Dust's location by the irritated magic and equally desperate calling. They were quiet as they pushed the door open, glancing in to check on the situation.

Nightmare was standing in front of a closed closet, looking a mixture of exasperated and concerned. Erratum made a gesture, grabbing his attention silently. The god stepped back enough to allow the spirit out of the room, keeping the door cracked a bit. Erratum gave him a sympathetic look, able to sense the exhaustion and concern. "He's been having this problem for a little while." Nightmare explained without needing prompting. "He doesn't see his brother anymore, something we know you are responsible for, but..." He sighed as he tried to find an explanation. "Now he has... voices, occasionally. The visual hallucinations are the worst though..."

Erratum appeared alarmed by this information. **"Visual and audio**

hallucinations?" They were surprised to hear that, and yet, it was entirely unsurprising as well. The monster had been through a lot of horrific things and dealt with a visual apparition for quite a long time. "**I'm... not certain if that's anything I can necessarily fix...**" They sighed with a spike in frustration. "**This is where having Sci's universe accessible would be extremely useful.**"

"Damn," Nightmare hissed before instantly flinching. Erratum merely breathed out an amused laugh at his kneejerk reaction. "We know it doesn't bug you but there is just certain decorum, all right?" He grumbled at their clear amusement. The Guardian said nothing in response, allowing the other to hold on to those old-time laws and manners. "How is Killer?" He questioned with equal concern.

"**Stable, thankfully. He doesn't seem too pleased about his condition, and I can tell he's having a lot of self-doubts that he's refusing to admit.**" Erratum sighed, knowing that Nightmare was obviously juggling a lot of high-maintenance monsters. Still, it made them smile a moment. "**You know, I realize a bit more why Hope chose you over your brother.**" Their remark earned a confused expression from the spirit. "**You bring a lot of Hope to the ones that have become the most hopeless.**"

"Shut up, we're going to check on him ourselves." Nightmare didn't appear too pleased by Erratum's observation, tendrils twitching a bit as he quickly walked by them. The god suppressed another laugh at his expense, turning instead to the slightly opened doorway. Their expression fell quickly at the reminder, the seriousness of the matter washing back over them as they quietly entered the room.

They noticed it was torn up quite a bit, perhaps not as much as the first time they had been here but still a significant amount. Dust was nowhere in sight, but Erratum could guess where he was from where they had seen Nightmare standing. The god quietly crossed the room to the closed closet, giving a few gentle knocks on it to alert the monster of their presence. "**Dust,**"

"Oh great. It's you."

Erratum bit back a smile at his displeasure, always finding it amusing how much all of them protested out loud despite the god hearing the contrasting call in their souls. Still, they continued on as though they didn't know. "**I did hear you, after all. You don't have to pretend like you didn't call, and you know I don't judge.**" They reminded him instead, waiting patiently for any response. It was quiet for a stretch of time after that, as though Dust was trying to wait them out. Erratum had absolutely nowhere to be, however, and merely tucked their hands together in their sleeves in silent wait.

"They're..." Dust started, capturing Erratum's attention immediately. "Can you see them?" He questioned softly. Erratum was uncertain what he was talking about, turning their head and glancing around the room. They sensed no other soul present and assumed this was one of those visual hallucinations Nightmare had spoken of. "On the bed... they're just..."

"**I don't see anyone out here, no.**" Erratum assured with a small frown. "**Can you tell me exactly who it is you're seeing? What they were doing?**" They prompted gently, not wanting him to shy away from the topic now that it was out in the open. They listened idly to the scratches coming from within the closet, wondering what Dust was up to.

"Them... they're just staring." That didn't answer too many questions, but Erratum didn't push it. "They're just... mocking me. I can tell by the look in their eyes. Mocking me for not being able to stop them, for being too weak to even bother harvesting the execution points." He continued with a harsh growl underlying his words. Erratum quickly concluded this was supposed to be Chara he was seeing.

"**I see,**" Erratum paused a moment at this and reworded themself. "**Well, I *don't* see, that is. There isn't anyone here, though I understand they are very real to you.**" They moved

quietly to crack open the closet door. Dust was settled on the ground, whitling at something in his hand anxiously. "**Have you been experiencing these hallucinations for a while?**" They questioned him gently, not wanting to appear prying or judgmental. The monster was silent, though he slowly nodded after a moment. Erratum pitied him deeply as he tried to distract his mind by carving with his knife. The god hummed a bit as they settled on the ground in front of the closet, moving their hand as a screen appeared before them.

Dust gave them a surprised look as they withdrew a bar of soap from it, giving him a fond look. "You... kept that?" He seemed shocked that the other had held onto what he had seen as a useless bit of junk. Erratum seemed perplexed he would even ask, however.

"**Of course I kept it, you made it.**"

Dust hated how that made his soul ache. He huffed and put up his crass mask instead to protect himself. "Whatever, do what you want I guess." He muttered as he shaped the one in his hand a bit more. He could feel their eyes peering into him, giving him a bit more anxiety at the attention. He glanced up with a harsh glare, trying to convey his annoyance to them.

Erratum seemed more focused on his handwork, however. "**You've gotten quite skilled with that.**" They noted with something akin to pride in their tone. "**I can practically see you in your own little workshop down the road in my world.**" The comment seemed almost absently stated, though it caused Dust's head to snap up immediately. The god's gaze seemed far away now, as though they truly were envisioning it.

"Your world, huh?" Dust spoke, trying to poorly hide his interest in this statement. The god blinked a few times, as though only now registering their own words. "Didn't know you had your own world." He continued, glancing them up and down a moment. He wondered what kind of ridiculously lavish and powerful world that must be.

Erratum seemed to grow a bit more solemn, however, leading Dust to believe it wasn't all that wonderful.

"**I used to,**" Erratum began with a weak smile on their face. "**It wasn't much, I'm sure in comparison to anything you're thinking that is, but it was my home. It was a simplistic world full of monsters with various skill sets and a large community of us running our own sort of hobby shops.**" They laughed quietly at the entirely bemused expression on the monster's face. "**I know, hard to imagine, isn't it? I certainly don't appear the type but,**" The god strung out a few strings between their fingers.

Dust hummed with a slow nod. "Right, the sewing and knitting thing..." He muttered mostly to himself, staring down at the half-finished figurine in his hand and imagining running a little shop with homemade wooden and soap sculptures and figurines. "So... what happened to your world? You talk about it like it doesn't exist anymore." He glanced up as the god sighed heavily, adjusting themself more comfortably on the floor.

"**How much time do you have?**"

Dust then found himself listening to the tale of Erratum, from humble narcoleptic shopkeeper to celestial being. It seemed entirely hard to believe, but from all their interactions with the unpredictable god, it certainly wasn't entirely implausible. They blew out a long sigh after they finished, feeling the same emotional turmoil the other seemed to be expressing. "Damn..."

"**Indeed.**"

Dust gave them a good look over, trying to search for more answers

on the other's face. "How the hell do you do this then? How do you keep going without entirely melting down or becoming as fucked up as us?" He needed to know their secret; how they managed to remain so perfectly at peace and unbothered all of this time. The sad smile he got in response answered nothing for him.

"**It is bold of you to assume I'm not.**" That answer seemed to surprise Dust, and Erratum found it in themself to laugh a bit. "**You haven't seen me break down before. It is not often, but when it *does* happen...**" The god frowned, seeming to recall those moments without any fondness. Dust then considered what someone with such unfathomable power and centuries of trauma must be like when they finally snap. He shuddered at the mere thought, which the god seemed to notice. "**Exactly.**"

Dust opened their mouth, ready to make another comment on the matter, but he instantly froze. Erratum seemed to notice, confused and slightly concerned by the distant look in his eye. Dust barely saw them, however, as a shadowy figure peered down over the god's shoulder. Their red eyes burned into Dust, an unsettling smile visible through the shadows as it silently appraised him.

"**Dust?**" Erratum attempted, knowing better than to try any sudden movements. The last time they let their guard down and got too close, they soon found themself pathetically floating in front of the other Guardians with a hole in their chest.

"They're behind you..."

Erratum was immediately a little spooked by the way he whispered this, momentarily believing there was something lurking behind them. They turned their head slowly, realizing there was nobody present and recalling the original reason they were there. "**No one is here, Dust. Focus your attention on me, not whatever you're seeing.**" They could tell he was progressively getting more and more wound up, however.

Dust was fixated on this hallucination, believing it was very real in his disturbed mind. The shadowy figure moved to place a glowing red knife against the Guardian's neck, said god seeming entirely unaware of the danger. The sudden jerky movements he made seemed to alarm the god, who held their hands out in a placating manner. Dust ignored their body language, however, and pushed the Guardian backward with a wave of magic.

Erratum winced as their back thumped against the bedframe, still seated on the floor but much more disheveled now. They tensed as Dust made another move at them, momentarily believing they were about to receive another stab to the chest and, once again, cursing their lowered guard. They were confused, however, when the distressed monster was soon half in their lap, seemingly trying to bracket the other in with their body. The god was perplexed by the strange action, staring up at his alarmed face. "**What are you-?**"

"They were going to kill you!" He cut them off immediately, eyes wide as though shocked the other had sat there and done nothing about this. "I saw them. They were going to slice your neck and you just... you were just sitting there." He seemed extremely shaken up, and despite the seriousness of his situation and mental status, Erratum still felt touched the other would move to try and protect them.

Erratum moved to gently grasp either forearm attempting to box them in, feeling the other resist their movements with panic. "**Dust, Dust *easy,"*** They instructed gently, managing to lower his arms to give themself some room to move again. "**No one's here, I promise you. The things you're seeing are only in your mind, though I hate how distressing this is for you.**" They could see how agonizing this was for him. Dust's breaths were coming in harsh gasps and even tears beginning to dot at his sockets. The god felt a pulse of shared agony, moving themself to do something they're certain would have gotten them stabbed in the past.

Dust tensed as he found himself with his face pressed against the

other's shoulder, feeling the tight squeeze of arms wrapping around him. He realized the other was holding him, securing his face to their shoulder to keep him from potentially seeing anything else. He didn't know what to do with his body or arms, completely thrown off by the sudden position. No one had ever done this, at least, not since before he destroyed his own universe. He couldn't believe, well he could, the god would be bold enough to do something like this when he was so obviously unhinged.

Still, despite himself, he leaned willingly into them and let their body fall loose from their tense posture. Erratum gave an encouraging hum at this, causing Dust to become a little choked up as he realize the genuine concern they had.

Over someone like him. Someone who had tried to kill them on more than one occasion.

Erratum jolted the slightest bit at the first shaky sobs, genuinely surprised that he had broken so quickly. They had honestly expected more fighting or harsh words from him, but it appeared there was no more fight in his body to do so. The Guardian settled themself more comfortably, suspecting they would be here for quite a while as the other fully melted down.

Nightmare was patiently waiting for Erratum to return from their rounds on the others upstairs. After Dust's hysteric meltdown and Killer's small magic attack, the god appeared even more shaken than they had been earlier that day. Despite the seriousness of the situation, the spirit had the nerve to Hope this would make it easier to force them to actually rest for the night. They're certain Erratum had pushed through more distressing things and kept going, but it was

nothing a little persuasive magic couldn't fix.

The spirit perked up a bit as the other descended the stairs, looking as exhausted as Nightmare expected them to be. After draining their magic on Killer and their emotional strength on Dust, the other looked ready to topple over. Nightmare knew they wouldn't but their vulnerable state made the spirit's potential plan easier to attempt. The Guardian eventually stopped in front of him, eyes weary as they gave him a soft smile. The spirit was silently warmed that they would still attempt to fulfill his request to find him when they were finished, especially when they were obviously so drained.

"Come with us," Nightmare started easily, opening a portal to make it easier on the poor god. "We think it would be easier to discuss some things away from prying eyes." He insisted, grabbing the other by the wrist and leading them forward. The Guardian followed willingly, allowing Nightmare to pull them through the open portal and into a strangely enchanting new environment. They stopped to momentarily admire it, wondering if they were still in the same universe.

The area was darkened with the blanket of night, only lit up by the full moon and flashing of fireflies around them. The grass was slightly overgrown and a small, naturally occurring pond seemed situated in the middle. They glanced backward, noticing an opening that was shrouded by heavy foliage from the outside. Erratum turned their attention to Nightmare, anticipating an explanation from him.

"When *I* was a child," Nightmare emphasized the change in pronouns, guiding the other to settle on the ground near the small body of water. "When it was late at night, when Dream was asleep at the tree and the village lanterns were snuffed out, I would come here. No one knew of this place and no one ever found me when I came here. It was the only place I felt safe enough to let my guard down, to truly let out some of the hurt I felt. It was as comforting as much as it was isolating." He explained.

Erratum was quiet a moment, taking in these words with a small frown. "**This...**" They started, staring down into the water a moment. "**Must be a place of great significance to you.**" They knew what this was, at least partially. They could tell the dark spirit still had something up their sleeve, however. Nightmare seemed pleased, however, with the acknowledgment.

"It is," Nightmare agreed with a wistful expression Erratum knew too well. "We still came here after everything happened, at least sometimes. I," He made sure to tap the clean part of his skull. "Was hardly aware for the most part, but toward the end, I was very lucid. I think the Corruption felt a connection here too, like it could release some of this protective guard it constantly held up." The tendrils behind him split between testing the water in front of them and winding around the Guardian's arm. "I think it was lonely as well, or some sort of semblance of mournful. It never really discussed it with me, even now." He glanced to Erratum again, judging their expression.

"**As tragically sad as that is, I suppose it's also a beautiful thought. A hidden grotto for a lonely prince.**" They mused, earning an embarrassed huff. "**I don't mean to embarrass. I understand in a way; that things are always easier to deal with or speak of in a secluded area, especially in the dark. Night time always makes it easier to share things, like the dark can keep a secret.**" They turned their head at the quiet laugh it earned.

Nightmare shook his head a bit at them, as though they could hardly believe them. "Between the nonsense and reckless actions you take, we're always surprised when you have a genuinely charming thought." He could see it flustered the other a bit, which only brought him more satisfaction. "But, we're glad you think so. It *is* the perfect place to let go of some deep hurt with the security it will stay within this forgotten grotto."

Erratum slid their eyes back to him, beginning to sense where this was going. "**Is that so.**"

Nightmare took this statement as a challenge, glancing back at them knowingly. "It is," He agreed at the obvious suspicion they had. "We both know this was a long time coming." He addressed the other's suspicion head-on. "You won't allow yourself to let out some of that negativity you keep trapped in you and Guardians above know what that's done to you." He gestured to himself at this point. "We've seen you, however. We've seen your lows, the parts you try to hide, the vulnerability you pretend doesn't exist behind your larger-than-life persona."

Erratum was becoming uncomfortable with the discussion, glancing away quickly at his intense expression. **"There's no sense in all that, Nightlight. I'm not bursting at the seams trying to keep myself together. I feel like I've done well trying to be more open, haven't I?"** They glanced at him, seeing the gentle expression on his face.

"You have," Erratum smiled the faintest bit at his approval, glad he thought so. "But you need to take another uncomfortable step forward with that. We can bear through the brunt of whatever spills out when you open that box again, but you have to be the one to do it." He could see them instantly attempt to mentally hold the lid on that box down at the reminder. "Stop doing that," He frowned sharply, one tendril moving to bat at the side of their face insistently.

"I don't like what it does to my mind." Erratum spoke softly at his proposal. **"What... it brings out in me."** They knew Nightmare was aware of what they were speaking of, but Erratum didn't want to mention it. It made it more real, made it surface in their mind more readily. Nightmare did appear sympathetic, but the god could tell he wasn't swayed despite it all.

"That's why we're here," Nightmare continued to push, turning to face them fully. "After it's all over, when you've purged all of that from your system, I can soothe the pain and prevent *it* from holding you hostage." He knew the other appreciated him not directly referencing it, though they still seemed extremely guarded. "Don't make us force it out of you again, please. It's the only way to get through it."

Erratum clenched their jaw tightly, terrified of letting that all out. Nightmare had seen them vulnerable before, and even seen the inner recesses of their mind, but...

"**I'm... afraid of what you'll think after seeing it.**" They admitted, much to the spirit's sorrow. "**It's one thing to see my shortcomings and thoughts, but...**"

"To experience the true falling of your walls is another thing, we get it, we do. However, we're the embodiment of all negative feelings." Nightmare reminded them with a sad smile, moving forward to take both of their hands. "We would honestly respect you much more to accept that part of yourself the way you accept us."

Erratum silently cursed the way the other could play them. It felt inevitable at that point, as though the lid were already partway off their protective box. "**Please don't make me...**" They gave a last-ditch effort to save face, but even that sounded desperate and like a loss of control. Nightmare gave a quiet sigh, pitying the other's deep seeded belief to keep it all in, to not trouble others with anything. The quiet begging nearly did him in, and only his determination to pull this suffering out of them kept him from caving.

"I'm sorry, but you need this." Nightmare hardly noticed the pronoun change as he released one of their hands, bringing his own to the side of the god's face tenderly. "Please, just... just look at me." He instructed gently, pained by the almost betrayed look he received from the other. "No one else has to know. It will be our secret kept under the safety of the dark." He soothed, softening further as the mask crumbled away before his eyes. He barely had time to brace himself before he was blasted with a wave of negativity. He struggled to breathe a moment, his soul instantly absorbing the powerful source the moment it battered his body.

He wasn't all that surprised that as powerful as the smile on their face was, the power of their wails matched it.

"There we go..." He whispered softly, ignoring the stinging against his hand from the tears. He could see where individual droplets would escape the divots along their face, tracing a thin line of gold over an unblemished area. "Oh, my Erre..." He murmured softly, bringing them down closer as he practically wrapped both arms around their skull to hide them away in his cloak. "Your suffering is so intense... I can't believe this lived inside of you for so long." He could feel tears on his own face, but he could hardly blame himself with the intensity of their own anguish. "You're so strong to shoulder this and still strive to hold onto other people's sorrow as well." He praised them quietly, gutted at the deeply wounded sobs that tore from the god's unwilling body. "Shh, you're okay, my Erre. I'm right here, I'll always be here for you."

Nightmare felt them press to him harder, sobs hitching on a rougher level than before. He was startled they could even find the ability to push more out of them, but he said nothing as he continued to gently talk them through the seemingly endless stream of toxic energy. "You're breaking my heart here." He managed with a weak smile. "I want to wrap you up and hide you away from the worlds, from your obligations, just so you can have some reprieve. Just so you can have time to get *all* of this out." He felt a bit of spite in his soul toward the higher beings that had put the Guardian in this crushingly stressful position. He could only hide them away for now, for this little bit of time they had away from everything. Nightmare wished he could do more, but there was nothing he could truly do.

"I'm right here..." He soothed once more, staring upward a moment at the bright moonlight above them.

"I'm here..."

Chapter End Notes

VCL made another gut-wrenching piece based upon an idea of

their own of Nightmare and Erratum.
It was such a good piece I knew it'd be perfect to overlay it with the teaser I made for the coming chapter: Final Night

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CwoWjZ4PfHM

I made this rather quick and without great mic quality (hence the small peaks asfdg) and no cleaning up my vocals. RIP, but it gets the point across. c:

Chapter 38: Final Night

Chapter Summary

Errata struggles emotionally and physically trying to balance what is happening in the multiverse and Geno and Reaper's bonding ceremony.

Chapter Notes

Hello again. Don't mind the title; it's not that alarming. :D

We uh. We're close, like real close. That's wild to me. I'm feeling extremely low still so hopefully I can do this chapter some justice. I suppose we'll see.

https://www.deviantart.com/vcl2006/art/Creator-vs-Creation-927945705
Also VCL, once again, with their incredible art of Ink vs Nightmare. UGHIOSSGD

Enjoy

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The following two weeks were absolutely disastrous for Erratum.

They had successfully distracted Dream enough through talks of the upcoming bonding ceremony and what they needed to do. The spirit was extra eager to help them prepare and eagerly spilled information onto the god that they weren't sure they could fully absorb. The entire thing seemed much more complex than it originally appeared on paper, but they were willing to do this last thing for Geno. Throughout their workings to pull this together, guided by both Dream *and* Reaper, the god found themself further perplexed by the whole thing.

Geno had come to Erratum pleading with them not to make it too extravagant and stick to simplicity.

Erratum lamented the fact that this was something they could not promise. Reaper had reached them first.

While this was rather stressful for the god to set up, it wasn't what made the weeks unbearable. It was the constant colliding of universes that crippled them the most. The first time it had happened was a mere day after the conflict between Ink and Nightmare. The Guardian had collapsed in Nightmare's study, seizing with the pain while the spirit panicked and attempted to stabilize them. Once Erratum explained the issue, after the spirit had dragged them to the sofa to further fret over them, Nightmare had gone quiet and solemn. The two champions had appeared to Erratum shortly after, giving them sympathetic looks. This was something Erratum had to do alone, but they all waited around until they returned, eyes listless and body shaking.

That was just the first of many.

Each day, more Help_tales were beginning to manifest in painful collisions that left the Guardian rocked to their core. The only good thing that came out of it was their ability to control their reaction, not automatically calling out for their champions each time it happened. It was better if they didn't realize how bad things were becoming; how unstable the multiverse was growing at Ink's deliberate actions. It was the god's worst fears manifesting each day the cycle repeated; collision, confrontation, consumption. It was taking a drastic toll on their mental health and they were entirely aware of it. It only made the invasive thoughts stronger in their mind as well.

In the last encounter they had with the creator, they had momentarily lost themself. They managed to pull it back together before they could do something they'd regret, settling on snapping the artist's brush in half once more. That should keep him from creating more messes for a

few days, enough time for them to get through the bonding ceremony at least. They couldn't mess this up, not when it was so important to the two monsters.

They couldn't afford to mess this up.

"Not that I'm telling you how to do your job..."

Erratum glanced over to Dream, who was currently dressed in a set of formal robes with the symbol of Faith woven into the back of it. Everyone had shown up in some rather nice clothing, setting wrapped gifts on a table set up off to the side. Dream had given them a scrutinizing look when he caught them going over everything one last time, seeming to judge their normal attire. "However... are you *really* just going to wear your regular robes for this?"

"What's wrong with my regular robes?" Erratum questioned defensively, glancing down over their robes. **"This is what Karma bestowed upon me over a millennia ago."**

"Um, exactly." Dream replied with a small frown. "It's *old*... so old." He remarked, much to the offense of the other. "Plus, you're *officiating* and *blessing* this union, Errata! You need to be, you know, dressed like a god!" He complained. "Not that you aren't now but... you know what I mean!"

"You give me way too much credit, Dream."

Dream sighed with exasperation, running a hand over his face. "Do you not own *anything* else?" He griped at them, which only earned a further displeased look from the Guardian. The spirit glanced past them a moment, seeming to perk up as he spotted something. "Oh! See, you *do* have something!" He insisted, much to Erratum's confusion. They turned to try and see what the other did, spotting it immediately.

The bowl their statue self normally held at their altar was dried up and empty of water, a set of sheer, white cloth cradled within it. The god quickly approached the altar, removing the material from the bowl carefully. Once removed, the statue began its artificial weeping once more, dripping water back into the bowl. The Guardian held the article close, closing their eyes as they recognized the familiar touch of Karma within the threadings. They gave a tired smile, comforted by the provider who continued to watch over them.

"That definitely works." Dream approved as he made a shooing motion at them. "Go! Change, now! You're cutting it really close!" He complained while Erratum rolled their eyes and vanished to change their attire. The spirit huffed with irritation, shaking his head after they had disappeared. He turned his head as he sensed his brother, flushing a bit and resting a hand against his forehead. "Brother... do you have to do this *now?"* He sighed.

"Yes." Nightmare replied, seeming pleased with himself. He had his own set of dark purple robes, the symbol of Hope displayed in a similar fashion on his back. A blue scarf was also tucked around his shoulders, much to Dream's further exasperation. "You're *way* too stressed out about this entire thing. This isn't even *your* ceremony, Dream." He snickered at the other's flustered worry. Dream huffed at him irritably, crossing his arms tight against his chest.

"I'm the *only one* who's been keeping everything together! Guardians above know that if I weren't directing this it would have been a *disaster."* Dream informed him, to which the darker twin shrugged.

The bright spirit didn't seem pleased with his dismissal, but his attention was drawn away as Erratum returned. Nightmare's teasing snickers had died out soon after, but Dream was more focused on the god. "Perfect! Much better." He approved

"If you say so." The god was wrapped in a delicate white material that elegantly hung off their body. The hood of the robe was sheer like a veil, nearly covering everything but their face in the light material. The robe sleeves hung in a similar sheer way at the ends, barely making it past the tips of their fingers. The white material was wrapped in lines of gold, seeming to mimic the patterns the other held on their own body. At the back, of course, the symbol of Karma was engraved in a similar golden colour. **"It feels more like *I'm* the one about to stand before a Guardian."**

"Not yet," Dream replied with a grin, earning a flustered growl from his brother. "You look perfect, I promise." He insisted as he glanced at his twin cheekily. "Right, Nighty?" He encouraged with a slight nudge. Nightmare glowered at Dream for his teasing, obviously displeased with his antics. Still, he glanced over to Erratum once more, tendrils twining together behind himself.

"Yeah... you do." Nightmare assured before clearing his throat nervously. Erratum gave a quiet laugh at this, appreciating both of their inputs. Their eyes landed on the scarf draped around the other, another painful squeeze tightening their soul. It did warm their achy soul to see him wrapped up in it, but knowing how everything was turning out, it only stung a lot more. The darker spirit turned their head with an annoyed expression, watching as his boys snickered and took apart one of the decorative flowers one petal at a time.

The three monsters appeared extremely surprised and confused when they realized the invitation had extended past Nightmare to them as well. Erratum had insisted that, so long as they could behave themselves and not torment any of the guests, they were absolutely allowed to attend. Dust and Killer had attempted to play off their delight, while Horror was openly grateful to the Guardian for their consideration. The god elected not to reveal to the guests that Horror

had made a lot of the refreshments; no need for them to become wary and suspicious of the food for prejudice reasons.

"I had wondered where my scarf had disappeared to." They felt it best to ignore it for now; it was too late to stop this anyway. The spirit seemed embarrassed yet pleased at the acknowledgment, one hand moving to toy with a thread at the end of the scarf. **"Is everything ready?"** They checked, to which both twins gave a firm nod. **"Excellent, I'm going to check on Reaper and, hopefully, get everything underway."**

"We'll get people moved to their positions." Nightmare assured the god before heading off to do so.

"I'll wait with Geno! Nighty will send me the cue when it's time." Dream assured the god before quickly disappearing as well. Erratum breathed out an amused laugh at their excitement, moving toward the decorated gazebo where the demigod was waiting. The entrance was draped in a white curtain, tied back with vines and blooming with large white flora. The walkway up to the steps was drizzled in similar white petals to the point the greenery of the grass and stone wasn't even visible. A set of fairy lights were strung up in the arch of the gazebo, illuminating the white flowers in a gentle yellow glow.

Overall, it was elegant and romantic.

Reaper was waiting under the arch of flowers lining the veiled curtain, looking anxious and tugging at the dark black and red cloak that draped his body. Erratum sighed as they approached, giving the demigod an amused look. **"Why are you so anxious? This is what you wanted, right? Don't tell me you're having second thoughts *now.*"**

Reaper blinked up at them, shaking his head quickly in response. "Of

course not, I'm... just nervous. It's a big day, you know? What if things go wrong? What if he changes his mind? What if our souls don't properly bond because of his-"

Erratum grasped his hands tightly in their own, halting their spiraling thoughts. The god gave him a serious look, keeping the demigod from speaking anymore. "**Reaper,**" They started, making sure they had his attention. "**Everything will be *fine.* Things will be okay, he's *not* going to change his mind for Guardian's sake. Geno loves you and he wouldn't wait until the last moment to decide he doesn't want this, trust me. Your souls will be fine, everything is *fine."*** They squeezed his hands a bit tighter, looking troubled for just a moment. "**Everything is going to be fine.**"

Reaper glanced over their face a moment, searching for any sort of deception. He relaxed soon after, giving them a weak smile. "Yeah, I know... you're right, I'm just overwhelmed. I didn't think I'd ever find myself in this position one day. Seemed hard to imagine with the death touch issue, you know?"

Erratum hummed their understanding, releasing his hands after another moment. "**I know, but things are different now. You're *allowed* to have this, Reaper.**" They reminded him before brushing past them to stand under the arch a step above him. "**Now... are we ready to start?**" They glanced around a moment, seeing everyone gathered around. Geno's brother, that universe's Sans, and Fresh were standing off to the right side of the floral altar and pathway. They were all giving a thumbs up, aside from Fresh who shot them a set of finger guns instead. To the left side, Life, and Grim, Reaper's twinned demigod brother, were standing in waiting. Geno's universe's Frisk had been cleaned up to deliver the rings to the couple when the time was right, finding a way to incorporate his entire 'family' into the ceremony.

"I think so." Nightmare agreed as he climbed the stairs past them to join the others lining the back of the gazebo. All of the current champions were aligned in the back, dressed in formal wear that honoured their respective Guardians. Cross and Blue gave Erratum a

respectful nod and settled in the center of the champions. Epic was grinning and occasionally whispering back and forth with Cross, attempting to remain hushed so as not to disrupt anyone. T.K was at one end, waving enthusiastically at Erratum to assure he was ready for them to begin. Nightmare gave the god a warm look, leaving room for his brother to join him.

The only one not present was Ink.

The Guardian nodded at the group before turning around again, their golden magic whisping around and capturing the attention of the guests. The god gave an exasperated smile as Temmie came trotting down the aisle, tripping over the fabric of its dress as flower petals spilled messily out of the basket they carried in their mouth. The suppressed snickers and snorts they could hear assured the god that everyone else found it just as amusing. Temmie reached the end rather quickly, dropping the basket and coughing out a few petals at the base of the altar.

"Tem do good??"

"Yes, thank you." Erratum managed without laughing themself, watching the pleased monster take their basket and hurry back to their seat. The various Temmies had their own section a bit further from the rest of the crowd. It was hard to accommodate the amount of them, after all, and they had their own section to make fascinating noises and vibrate excitedly. The god glanced back at Nightmare, who nodded and closed his eyes momentarily to speak with Dream. After a moment, he opened his eyes and gave them another nod to assure them he was ready.

Reaper was still wringing his hands together nervously, soul pounding in his chest as he waited at the altar anxiously. He perked up a bit as he caught sight of Dream, who ushered a sheepish and embarrassed-looking Geno out with him. The demigod watched with a single glowing light in his eye, captivated as Dream led him through the

petals. The shy monster had a gradient gown, white at the top that faded to a black colour the further down it went, the sleeves following a similar pattern. Both sleeves hooked over his middle finger, spreading across the expansion of his hand like a glove.

Reaper still couldn't believe he had talked the other into wearing it, but it was a three-day fight he was *so* glad he had soldiered through.

Geno seemed to give him a look that *dared* him to say something, but Reaper was too busy admiring him as he approached. Dream gave them both bright grins as he handed him off to Reaper, the demigod taking his hand reverently and nearly wrapping him up in his wings. The bright spirit quickly made his way into the solid structure, settling beside his brother eagerly. Nightmare appeared to whisper something to him that made Dream puff up indignantly and hiss something quietly back.

Erratum cleared their throat, grabbing everyone's attention once more as the area fell silent.

"**Thank you for being here today to bear witness to the union of two Fated souls.**" The god announced, glancing down at the couple that was currently absorbed in each other. "**It is not often that a deity finds another soul they wish to spend their extended, potentially endless life with.**" They gave the two monsters a fond look, taking comfort in their obvious joy. "**To see a mortal capture the heart of a deity is a feat many other mortals would envy, but none could possibly replicate the bond I have seen grow between these two.**" They gave them both expectant looks, only huffing a quiet laugh when they both jolted back to awareness when they realized they needed to say something.

"Geno," Reaper gave him the same fond smile he always did when he said his name, making the other wish he had his scarf to bury his face into like normal. "When I first saw you, I knew you were a persistent little soul that refused to bend to the call of death. I admired that

immediately, and maybe it made me want to tease you a little." Geno refrained from quipping 'a *little?'* and allowed him to continue. "Something about how dismissive you were, how huffy and disinterested to attempted to appear with me kept me coming back. I never grew bored of teasing flustered looks and indignant words out of you, and I could tell it surprised you when I first voiced my interest in you. You kept turning me down, over and over, but I still kept coming back." He grinned, as though those were rather fond memories to him. "When you first held my hand, when I first mastered control over my deathly touch, I knew your walls had crumbled. I was so happy when you finally caved, and I'm simply amazed every day by you. You keep me levelheaded and, admittedly, humble with your attitude and sheer presence." The demigod reached up to gently wipe away a tear Geno hadn't realized escaped him. "I love you so much, and there's no one else I would rather have here with me. I give you my soul, Geno, to carry with you for the remainder of our days."

Erratum was already struggling to hold their own composure together, the gold lines on their face brighter than before. Geno appeared to be struggling all the same, quietly cursing him for making him so emotional so quickly. The demigod was patient with him, allowing him time to pull it together so his voice wouldn't waver when he spoke.

"I'm still incredibly impressed you have the capacity to say such sincerely sweet things after everything else I've heard you say." Geno huffed, earning a soft chorus of laughter from the audience. "You frustrate me so much on a regular basis and your ego is what first made me push you away entirely. Your playful teasing and looming presence constantly bugged me, and you were so *persistent.* You just *would not stop* no matter how many times I threatened you."

Reaper wasn't certain if this was supposed to be heartwarming but he listened anyway.

"Then I started anticipating your presence, and soon enough, I was *looking forward* to it. I was so angry at myself for it too, and I refused to let you in when you finally admitted your interest. It felt like if I

agreed, you'd be winning the little game that had been going on between us." He scrunched his face up a bit at this, and Reaper breathed out an amused laugh at the admittance. "Of course, you broke me eventually, and I gave you a chance. You always toed the line between endearing and downright insufferable, and maybe that's why I was so into you. I hate that too, but the soul does what it wants, sadly. Throughout the entire time you courted me, however, you were... genuine. I saw what the real you looked like underneath the playful demeanor you tried to keep up. I've seen the parts you don't show to the world, and I know your sorrow the way no one else possibly ever can." The demigod softened further at his words, leaning into the hand that came to rest on his cheek. "As embarrassing as it is to say it in front of an attentive crowd, I love you very much. I give you my soul, Reaper, or whatever is left of it at least, to carry with you for the remainder of our days."

Erratum smiled down at the both of them, finding their little speeches matching perfectly to their personalities and their bond. The god looked behind themself, knowing it was time for the *stranger* parts of the ceremony. At least, in their eyes. The Guardian stepped back into the gazebo, making way for the duo to move past them to the table they had set up. Erratum gave a concerned look at Nightmare and Dream, as the brighter twin seemed to be shaking in place and staring pointedly at the ceiling. Nightmare appeared amused and unbothered by his plight, which assured the Guardian everything was okay.

Geno and Reaper were both holding containers full of sand, which still brought great confusion to the god even now. They mentally shrugged it off as they continued to just stick to the script. "**Let this represent your bodies. Should one of you ever perish, may the Guardians guide your souls back together in the afterlife. The mixing of the sand represents your dust, blending together until you become one once more.**"

A very dark sentiment, but who was Erratum to argue with customs?

Geno and Reaper tipped their containers into the cylinder container in front of them, black and red sand mixing and blending together as

they did. They both appeared satisfied with the display as Erratum sealed the container entirely. Apparently, the bonded couple would keep it, which Erratum also found to be horrifically grim, but again who were they to judge?

The sound of smaller feet across the wooden floor caught their attention again, bringing a smile to their face. Frisk appeared before the both of them, excitedly holding a pillow up for them that the two rings rested upon. Erratum gave them an approving nod as they redirected their focus back to the crowd again.

"**Let these rings represent the bonding the couple will share with one another in private as a public declaration of their bond.**" Erratum nodded to the both of them, watching as Reaper took the silver band in his hand. "**With the exchanging of this ring, you swear upon the Guardians above that you will remain at Geno's side for the remainder of your life.**" Reaper nodded firmly in agreement, gently taking Geno's hand to slide the ring on. Geno glanced over his hand a moment with a fond smile before managing to pick up the golden band with his own shaky hands. "**With the exchanging of this ring, you swear upon the Guardians above that you will remain at Reaper's side for the remainder of your life.**" Geno gave his own little nod, sliding the ring onto the other's hand with a bit of a struggle.

"**And so it will be.**" Erratum beamed down at them, silently relieved they had made it through the entire thing. "**I present for the first time, not courter and their chosen, but the bonded soul that is Geno and Reaper. You may seal your bond wi- Oh, all right.**" The god cleared their throat as Reaper appeared way ahead of them, pulling their startled partner close and pressing his mouth against his. Geno appeared exceptionally mortified by the display, pulling back a moment later and burying his face in his hands. The group of gathered monsters only applauded and cheered, however, not appearing to mind the gesture. Erratum breathed a sigh of relief as the two left the structure, watching as the other champions quickly moved from their spots to join the others.

"Dream, gracious, we *told you* you'd fall to pieces." Erratum glanced back as they heard Nightmare, looking on at the twins. Dream had his hand pressed firmly against his mouth where Erratum assumed it had been for quite some time. The positive spirit had tears streaming down their face while Nightmare patted his back comfortingly. "Don't worry, he's fine. It's all the positivity." Nightmare assured with a laugh. "It's a little nauseating, but nothing I can't handle. *Dream,* however..."

Erratum gave them both fond looks, amused thoroughly by their antics.

The celebration afterward was just as energetic and joyful as the ceremony had been. The couple profusely thanked everyone for their attendance and their generosity as they caught sight of the table full of gifts. Many laughs and sentiments were exchanged with one another, and Erratum got to witness Geno fully blossom under the reassurance of his partner's devotion. Even Nightmare's group were behaving themselves, for the most part at least. Despite the crowd's earlier apprehensions, they had all warmed up to the energetic bunch that carried on and riled up the party even further.

"**It really is beautiful, isn't it?**" Erratum hummed with a faint smile. They were still settled on the steps of the gazebo, watching the party from a distance. "**I'm glad I could at least do this for them before tomorrow. They're so happy, and that makes me happy in return.**" They continued before glancing beside them. "**What do you think will happen? How do you think the others will feel?**" They questioned softly.

The white dog continued to stare up at them, silent and waiting. Erratum sighed heavily as they glanced back toward the party

again. "**I guess there really is no way to know, but whatever happens, they'll be all right.**" They smiled, seeming pleased with this information. The white dog placed both front paws against their leg, stretching up toward them with a wagging tail. "**At least I have your confidence.**"

"Who are you talking to?"

Erratum glanced up to see Nightmare heading toward them, holding something in his hands. The god glanced down a moment, seeing the dog nowhere to be found.

"**No one, I suppose.**"

Nightmare gave them an odd expression as he joined them, sitting beside them with a sigh. "The positivity was getting to us. We needed to take a breather or we'll end up worse off than Dream." He chuckled, recalling the spirit trying to speak with guests while borderline choking on sobs. He could sense something was off with the Guardian, turning his body a bit to face them better. "Errata?" The call caused the god to face him again, catching a better glimpse at what the other was carrying.

"**Is that a bouquet?**" The god sounded amused, causing the spirit to hunch a bit as their tendrils curled slightly. "**Where in the world did you get that?**" They continued with a quiet laugh, unsure how the other got ahold of such a thing.

"Urg," Nightmare groaned in embarrassment at their pestering. "The bonded couple picks out someone from the crowd to bestow a 'blessing' upon. It's an old tradition before you ask. It's meant to bring luck to the receiver and, allegedly, they're the next one to be bonded." He seemed rather embarrassed by this, tugging at the scarf around him nervously. Erratum felt another pang through their soul, turning

their eyes from the bouquet up to the darkened sky once more.

Nightmare frowned as he took a better look at the god. "Are you *still* crying?" He seemed a bit concerned as he sat up on his knees, turning their head to face him. "Oh Erre... you've got new lines on your face now." He sighed as he traced them with his thumb, ignoring the burning pain. "What are we to do with you?" He spoke with exasperation, giving them a sad expression. "We thought *Dream* was being overly sentimental."

Erratum gave a breathless laugh at this, moving their arms to collect the spirit within them. Nightmare went willingly, confused and startled, but willingly. Erratum held him tight to their body, pressing their foreheads together with a weak smile. Nightmare frowned, unable to detect any emotion from the god. "Errata? What's... what's wrong? You're acting strange again..." He spoke quietly, uncertain what to do.

The god opened their eyes to stare into his own, causing the spirit to flush the slightest bit. "**Nothing... just wanted to hold you for a bit.**" They spoke earnestly, causing the flush to darken on the spirit as he sputtered.

"Don't...! Do you have to be so *direct??"* Nightmare complained in embarrassment, though he made no move to pull away from them. "We swear, you have zero shame and *zero personal boundaries.*"

"**You don't seem to mind.**" The god insisted, causing the other to scoff in return. He didn't argue, Erratum noticed, though they hadn't expected him to. The spirit was painfully obvious about his feelings on this, as much as Erratum had tried to deny it at first. "**Won't you stay with me? Just... just for tonight.**" They suddenly stated, surprising even themself with the request. Nightmare seemed just as surprised, staring wide-eyed at them. "**Sorry, that was... you don't have to answer that. I'm just being ridiculously emotional again.**" They assured with a weak smile. Nightmare didn't respond to this, moving

his hand to press against the side of their face again, mindful of the glowing magic this time.

"We... somehow don't believe you." He muttered quietly, having sensed the urgency in their original request. "We'll stay with you, you don't have to be afraid to ask. We'll always be there when you need us." He insisted, painfully genuine to the point Erratum only wanted to weep harder. The god resisted, closing their eyes tight once more as their foreheads continued to rest together in a comforting gesture. Nightmare still felt a lingering sense of concern for them, but he knew there would be no dragging their true thoughts out of them. He simply closed his eyes as well, basking in the affectionate attention the other freely gave.

"Thank you..."

Chapter End Notes

This got long because I had to bullshit the ceremony a bit asdfg

Bittersweet moments all around! So much emotion I could cry.

Now.

I'll see you next week.

Chapter 39: Ink Vs. Errata

Chapter Summary

It's time to end this.

Chapter Notes

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A0ruqYohK0I Feel free to jam to what I was listening to for inspiration.

Here it is.

Finally.

For almost nine months I have carried this chapter in my mind with pure excitement. I REALLY, REALLY hope that all of you can enjoy it. This is absolutely surreal to me to be writing it after so long of a buildup.

So please, everyone,

Enjoy

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Nightmare woke feeling drowsy, but warm that morning. He didn't remember falling asleep after everything; usually, he didn't crash until the early morning hours. However, it appeared to be at the peak of dawn, the sun of this plane settled just at the edge of the horizon. The spirit gave a tired sigh, briefly considering just letting himself drift off again, but the feeling of his resting place shifting under him drew him into further awareness. He realized he was settled against someone else, his body half supported by strong arms that held him against them.

The darker spirit then recalled the previous night. The entire bonding ceremony, the suffocatingly joyful reception, Erratum's soft pleas for him to stay. He couldn't deny them, of course, and he had stayed with

them, exchanging quiet words in the dark and trying to further deduce the mystery that was this Guardian. Nightmare pulled back the slightest bit and glanced upward, seeing the stoic face of the god as they stared into the distance. They seemed to sense his gaze, lowering their eyes until they met with his once more.

The smile felt off to Nightmare, accompanying no emotional energy behind it.

"**Good morning, Nightlight.**" The Guardian greeted quietly, earning another tired sigh from the spirit. It was too early for the god to be throwing around that ridiculous name.

"Did you even sleep?" Nightmare murmured in response, his tendrils stretching out behind him as he sat up straighter. He could feel more than hear the quiet rumble of a laugh they gave, feeling them rest their hands against his lower back to stabilize him.

"**You know I don't sleep,**" The god responded to this, which didn't seem to please the spirit. "**Don't give me that look, you already knew this. You've seen how I am when I sleep.**" They reminded him, which only brought a firmer frown to his face.

"We were right here! We could have consumed your nightmares!" Nightmare griped at them, though his irritation died down at the faraway look this brought to their face. "Errata?" He watched them blink back into awareness, turning their gaze to him once more. "What's on your mind? You've been off since last night." He wasn't going to be satisfied with a diversion or nothing answer, not this time.

"**I plan to launch an attack today.**"

Oh.

Nightmare wasn't expecting such a direct answer. His body jolted with the shock of this reveal, his tendrils raising with similar alarm. "What??" He sputtered in shock. "Errata! We didn't think... you didn't *want* it to be a war!" He reminded them, as though the other had forgotten. He could see the resolve in their face, however, and knew they were completely serious.

"**Things have progressed too far. In the end, I knew it would come to this.**" They sighed, seeming truly resigned as their face settled into one of despair. "**This... this was my last resort. Believe me, I don't want to have to do this. I *really* don't...**"

"Then don't!" Nightmare frowned as he gripped the tops of their shoulders tighter. "We can find another way, Errata. We can still try to fix his soul! We haven't had success with my magic in breaching The Between, but we *know* there's something we can do. We just have to-" The spirit's words fell short as the god leaned forward, brushing a gentle kiss against his forehead. He stared wide-eyed at the god as they pulled back, giving him a soft expression.

"**You've done so much for me, Nightlight. I don't think there's anything else we can do here.**" Erratum admitted, a sad smile gracing their face. "**Thank you for still believing in me despite it all.**" They slowly shifted themself again, Nightmare sliding off so Erratum could properly stand once more. He took the hand offered to him, Erratum pulling him back up onto his feet as well. Nightmare continued to stand back while the god called for their champions, feeling a torrent of emotions from their interaction.

Erratum didn't appear like they were about to address it, however, as Cross and Blue both appeared before them. They gave them quizzical looks, obviously confused about why they had been summoned. "**This might seem sudden,**" Nightmare realized they hadn't even discussed it with their *champions,* which only further concerned him. "**But I am launching an assault on the creator today.**"

The two champions seemed just as baffled by the declaration.

"You're joking, right?" Cross immediately questioned, scanning their face for any sign of dishonesty. "Guardian's above you're serious... why now? Why after all this time? Why *today??* We haven't even had time to properly strategize!" He chastised the god, frustrated by their seemingly impulsive decision.

"I agree," Blue frowned with obvious concern. "We should at the very least talk through this more. Ink is a tough opponent, but we-"

"There is no we."

Blue stopped short at this, Cross looking equally as perturbed.

"**I want you there as support once it all begins. There are *very* specific things I need from each of you.**" They continued, giving all of them a serious expression. Nightmare was struck with the realization that Erratum *had* planned all of this out, for quite a while by the looks of it. Erratum's turned back to Nightmare, earning his full attention once more at their expectant look.

"**Here's what I need from you first,**" They started, seeing the spirit straighten up subtly. "**Call for Dream.**" Nightmare seemed surprised by this request, frowning a bit.

"We're not sure how excited he's going to be with this news, but all right." He wasn't going to argue, closing his eyes as he called out to his twin. It only took a few moments before Dream appeared through a bright portal, looking alarmed.

"What do you *mean* attack?!" Dream questioned frantically, appearing more alarmed than the rest of them. "Errata! We-"

"**I'm not asking you to get involved,**" The god quickly clarified, knowing he would be resistant to the idea of fighting either of them. "**I know you wouldn't want to be a part of this and I'm not asking you to. There's just...**" They sighed a moment in thought, trying to find the right words.

"**I need you as bait.**"

"Excuse me?!"

Dream took a steady breath as he stood outside the normally tidy building the council meetings took place, anxiously gripping onto the front of his cape. The universe was rather empty, more a secret location that only the council knew of. Ink had made it, of course, and it was rather pretty for holding a very simplistic purpose. The grass always looked perfectly cut, an open field surrounding the council building. It was peaceful, Dream had thought when he had first seen it.

Now, it felt a lot more sinister.

Dream turned back to the field in front of him at the familiar bubbling noise, black ink rising from the perfectly trimmed grass. Ink formed

before his eyes, just a few meters away from where he stood. The creator scanned him up and down for a moment, a tight frown on his face.

"Why do you keep coming back."

It didn't sound like a question, but a demand. Dream could tell the creator was only holding back because of his own curiosity, wanting to see what the spirit would do or say. His brush appeared to be fixed, Dream noted quietly to himself. Erratum had admitted to snapping it again in a lapse of control, though Dream couldn't exactly blame them. He knew the other had been dealing with more colliding universes than they were willing to admit.

"I just wanted to try to convince you one last time." Dream replied, seeing the irritated look on the artist's face at that. "Please, Ink... let's just compromise. None of us want to actually fight you, we really don't. We just want to find a way to fix everything-"

"You want to fix *me."* Dream winced at the accusatory statement, watching Ink's eyes flash dangerously at his words. "You can't accept the way I am. My soullessness, my shortcomings-"

"Don't *even!"* Dream immediately butted in with a sharp frown. "Ink, every part of me wants to be next to you right now! The problem isn't you, it's *them."* The spirit tapped the side of his temple, keeping a careful eye on him. "The 'creators' that have been tormenting you are changing you, Ink. They're starting to run the show, and we just... *I* can't let that happen. I can't see you go down this path, Ink." He could feel himself tearing up, but he refused to cry. Not for them, not when this wasn't truly Ink anymore.

"Compromise," Ink scoffed the word, almost offended by the notion. "We haven't *changed.* This is who we always *were.* You just never

wanted to believe it, even now, when you've seen it for yourself. So if you're going to try and convince me to surrender to you, to *them,* then you've got another thing coming." He could see how crushed Dream was by this, but he didn't have the capacity to care anymore.

"Okay..." Dream breathed, wiping both sockets to clear away the tears. "I did what I could... the rest is up to you." He seemed reluctant to say this, causing Ink to furrow their browbones in confusion.

"Thank you Dream, I'll take it from here."

Ink swiveled around quickly at the familiar voice, rage immediately flaring at the sight of the Guardian. They were calmly standing a few dozen feet away, hands tucked passively into the dark sleeves of their robes. The artist always hated that calm demeanor and found silent delight in warping it into something uglier when he could. "Really? We're doing this again?" He seemed irritated as he glanced back at Dream before focusing on the god again. "I'm beyond negotiations. I won't-"

"This ends, right now."

Ink paused at this declaration, seeming caught off guard. He gave them another good look over, obviously surprised. "Yeah? You're finally here to settle things the *real* way then?" He challenged as he equipped himself with his brush. "I always thought you were holding back on me, but something in your expression seems *different.*" He provoked, though the firm determination never fell from Erratum's face.

"Only one of us can prevail, Ink." Erratum replied as their hands separated once more, threads tangled between them. **"It is obvious we cannot continue forward the way things are. Let this finally determine the Fate of the multiverse."** They glanced past Ink,

catching a glimpse of their two champions in their places.

Ink huffed as caustic paint dripped from the bristles of his brush.

"You talk too much."

The first arch of paint collided easily with the translucent firewall, which dropped shortly after as the god pixelated their way to him. Ink seemed surprised by this, swinging their brush the moment they materialized mere feet away. Erratum brought their arm up, however, and the brush collided with an unseen screen that flashed a bright gold before fading out as the brush retracted. The artist scowled as they continued to push them back, delivering blows that the Guardian continued to deflect with defensive blocks. A slight falter from the god unexpectantly pulling back, causing the paintbrush to swing short and the creator to jolt forward, left him open.

Rather than encasing him in threads or pushing him back with their console, they took matters into their own hands. Ink's head jerked to the side as the other delivered a harsh blow with their fist, momentarily knocking him silly. The artist stumbled a safer distance away, rubbing the side of his face with an offended look. "Did you just *punch* me??" He seemed absolutely appalled by this notion, watching as Erratum shook their hand out to soothe the dull ache.

Ink glanced back as he felt another presence, stiffening a bit as Blue and Cross loomed in the distance as well. They were obviously here to serve as support, but they currently weren't fighting him. The creator found it odd, but then again, he was hardly aware of what was going on in the first place. He took off in a run, using Broomie to vault over the god unexpectedly. He used the surprise to successfully slash a stripe of red paint across their back, earning a pained shout. Verse appeared soon after, even without a signaling gesture from the god, firing off a concentrated beam of data that knocked the creator back several feet.

Erratum was thankful for the unpredictable multiverse command console, giving them the time to grasp at their robe clasp and yank it loose. The flowing back of their robe fell away, taking most of the paint away with it. It still stung through the back of the remaining garment, but it was much more bearable now. They launched themself forward again, tangling the creator's arms up in a web of strings and yanking him forward again. Ink attempted to resist, using his body weight to yank back to throw them off. It was like a childish game of tug-of-war, but with their own lives at stake. Ink couldn't move his brush enough to break the strings, leaving him to be dragged forward at a slow rate.

"Urgh! So *irritating!"* Ink hissed as Erratum continued to force him closer. "Why won't you just *die?!"* The hiss was accompanied by a slew of paint shaping into sharp bony projectiles. The god set him free as they whizzed by their head, forced to dodge rather than capture the creator. Ink continued the assault of inky bones, smirking in amusement as the god continued to deflect them with the invisible shielding on their arms. Erratum finally broke away from the assault, a golden rift opening behind them. Ink stared on with wide eyes as they disappeared through it just as quickly as it was made.

Erratum landed on the other side, ankle deep in the waters of Waterfall. They were panting quietly, staring at the distant rift expectantly.

"**Come on... come on...**" They whispered, silently praying for him to take the bait.

It only took a few moments for the creator to launch back at them from the portal, crossing the barrier from that world into this one. Erratum felt a pang of relief, seeing their two champions corralling him forward.

So the creator was pissed enough to follow them. *Good.*

Erratum gasped as they barely leaned back in time to miss a swipe of a blade, not expecting the other to be wielding any knives. The artist seemed determined to stab them, however, but Erratum was *quite* versed in dodging incoming stabs.

"Hey! Those are my daggers!" Dream cried out in protest.

"*Yours?"* Cross questioned in shock, giving him a momentarily surprised look. He shook his head, refocusing on the task at hand as Ink continued to lash out at the god with both daggers. Where one would swipe threateningly, the other would follow through with an ill-intent stab. Erratum was sweating just a bit, always finding themself at the end of a pointy object.

The knife fight was interrupted by a sharp spear landing between the two, separating them apart. Sharp bony constructs ripped from the ground violently, causing them both to back off. Erratum turned their head and was met with the outraged looks of the Fell universe Undyne and Papyrus.

"GET OUT OF HERE!!" Undyne demanded, raising another spear threateningly over her head. "You're gonna tear this place apart with your fucking god fight!" She let the spear loose, growling as they both dodged it with ease. Erratum quickly opened a new rift, grunting as Ink didn't even wait for them to escape, tackling them through the tear in reality instead.

"Damn they're fast!" Cross complained as he watched them both disappear through. He ducked as several sharp bones flew over his head, barely missing his skull.

"OUT!"

The three remaining monsters quickly fled through the portal as well, not wanting to risk provoking either's wrath further. Blue gasped as they found themselves in his own universe, standing in the middle of town. Monsters had already fled into the buildings around to avoid the intense battle. Ink was still launching bones at the god, who pulled Verse up to absorb a majority of them. With a quick download, they were soon returning fire with the creator's own attacks.

"How are you doing that?!" Ink demanded as he dodged another inky bone. "You're cheating or something!"

"Cheating?! Are we really resorting to such childish nonsense?" Erratum growled at his petulant words, further provoked by him. They jolted as a looming blaster suddenly fired beside them, nearly colliding with the equally surprised creator. Erratum glanced at the floating construct, which seemed to peer back at them from the corner of its socket.

"Papy! Don't get involved!" Blue cried out as he spotted his brother lingering in front of Muffet's bakery doorway. The smaller brother knew he wouldn't listen, however. Not when Erratum was clearly locked in a battle with Ink. The creator scowled as they waved their hand around, bending a glob of ink in the air that quickly lashed out at Papyrus. The taller monster dodged easily, returning his glare with equal intensity. Blue knew if this continued either his brother was going to get killed, or Erratum would put themself between the two.

"ALL RIGHT, OUT!" Blue demanded, summoning his Warhammer threateningly and running at the duo. "Get out of my universe!" He hissed, watching as Erratum swiftly opened another rift at his demand. Blue swung his weapon fiercely, the blow knocking Ink back through the newly formed rift. Erratum gave him a respectful nod before diving in themself. The smaller champion huffed, glancing back at his brother. "We're going to have a talk later! After we're done!" He

chided before following Cross and Dream through the rift.

Erratum cringed as the tendril of ink lashed across their face, leaving an open wound against their mandible. They momentarily wiped away the marrow with their sleeve, pulling back further as though to lead him deeper into the world. Ink seemed to do just that, following them with brutal lashes that were filled with the clear intent to maim. The creator froze a moment as a hand crushed his shoulder, seeming to keep him still.

Ink glanced over his shoulder, paling the slightest bit as Horror grinned down at him. Dust and Killer soon appeared from behind him, matching wicked smirks on their faces as well. Ink jerked himself away from his brutal grip, backing away while keeping his eyes on them. Their back met another solid form, causing them to whirl back around again. Nightmare gave him a look that promised pain, violet magic already sparking around him.

"Boo."

A spherical manifestation of magic formed innocently in front of him, which soon expanded out and swallowed the artist in its necrotic grasp. As Ink began to yell, Erratum moved to pull Nightmare back by the back of his cloak. "**I told you not to do that!**"

"But he hurt you!" Nightmare scowled, one tendril coming to trace the gouge on their face. "We had to get at least *one* in." He could tell the other was slightly annoyed by his divergence in their plan, but the spirit really couldn't care less. Ink deserved it, in his mind.

The creator soon broke free, following Erratum through another rift they had already escaped into. The artist broke through the tear into the next world, glancing around a moment for the slippery Guardian. He caught sight of them, momentarily throwing Ink off his violent

rampage.

"It's a beautiful place, isn't it? It was probably one of my favourite worlds you made." Erratum addressed, staring up at the starry sky of Outertale. They had a wistful smile on their face, their back turned to Ink as they observed the stars. **"This is where I first got involved, the *exact* place where I first began defending worlds. It's nostalgic, in a way."**

"Good, it'll be a nice place to bury you then." Ink retorted, brush raising once more from its momentary passive position. Erratum huffed a quiet laugh as they turned once more to look at him, an unreadable expression playing across their face.

"I guess we'll see."

Ink rushed them again at their provoking words, brush slamming once more into the defensive screens they continued to counter with. He hardly even noticed the group of monsters that appeared through a separate darker portal, the other having closed up before any of them could follow the deities. Ink pushed the god back until there was nowhere else for the god to go, resisting as they slammed against them with another screen to move him.

Another wave of negative energy had Ink turning around again as he broke away from Erratum, seeming to notice everyone that had followed the both of them. Nightmare and his group, Dream, the two champions; everyone was against him. He could sense that he had been literally backed into a corner, stuck between a god and their group of followers. "You all... you think this is going to stop me? Do you think that you've won just because you outnumber me? I created *all* of you!" He snapped at the group still looming threateningly a bit away from the two. Ink backed away slightly, sensing their combined intent to see the Guardian prevail.

Ink jolted as a strong pair of golden strings suddenly wrapped around him. He struggled a moment as he was dragged backward, suddenly finding himself with his back pressed firmly against Erratum. He continued to struggle as the threads tightened, effectively wrapping around *both* of them and leaving them without any room to struggle. The creator tensed as Erratum leaned a few extra inches down, whispering something that made his entire body go numb.

" We were never leaving here alive..."

Ink's eyelights shrunk at this, beginning to struggle harder as Erratum backed them further toward the cliff often used for stargazing. Ink shot desperate looks to the group, who all seemed to be developing their own sense of alarm.

"E-Errata! Be careful, you're getting close to the edge!" Dream warned them, trembling as the Guardian gave him such... such a *sad* look. His soul began thrumming harder, terror coursing through him wildly.

"**All of you...**" Erratum directed their attention on the group, keeping steady despite the squirming artist against them. "**I didn't want this... I didn't want to let you in... because I knew what would happen in the end.**"

"Erre..?" Nightmare breathed, frozen to his spot at these alarming words. "I..We don't understand... wh-what-"

"It would just hurt so much... hurt *all of you* so much..." The Guardian exchanged a quiet look with Nightmare, seeing the realization rapidly rising on his face.

"Watch over all of them while I'm gone... won't you?"

The Guardian backed up further before letting gravity do the rest of the work. Ink managed to work an arm free, flailing it desperately as though there were anything to grasp. Erratum merely tipped backward, however, leaving them both freefalling directly over the edge. Ink's terrified scream echoed below as they fell, driving horror down further into all of their souls.

Dream rushed after his brother, knowing he had to stop him from doing something rash. "Nightmare! Nightmare, *stop!"* He managed to grasp onto his waist, dragging him down to the ground with great effort. Nightmare slammed his fist into the ground, wailing out his pain as he pleaded for his brother to let him go.

"Dream! *Dream, please!* We... I... I *can't* Dream, *please-!"*

The brighter twin shook his head violently, pressing him down further into the rocky terrain as he begged him through sobs. Dream was weeping as well, heartbroken after witnessing their last few moments. He knew, despite how much he had loved Ink, nothing could compare to the heartbreak and anguish of his brother.

His brother had lost what had brought him back from the edge, what had pulled him from the deepest recesses of his suffering. Everything Nightmare had done since he had been freed was for Erratum. The person he had loved the most, who had carried his very heart in their

hands, had vanished before his eyes.

Blue was leaning into Cross, weeping openly as he tried to keep himself from collapsing entirely. Cross had a sturdy hand on his back, head bowed as he mourned quietly to himself. Dust felt cold in his soul, like everything had been sucked out of him. He and Killer both glanced to Horror, who had fallen to his knees with his hands over his sockets. They both crouched down with him, numbly offering their silent solidarity with the monster.

It didn't feel real. It *couldn't* be real.

This couldn't be the end. It just *couldn't.*

Chapter End Notes

Huh.

Well, see you next week!

Chapter 40: Magic

Chapter Summary

Dark, dark, even darker.

And then, there was light.

Chapter Notes

OKAY.

SO.

AS AN EMPATH, I CAN SENSE SOME OF YA'LL WERE A LITTLE UPSET.

You all never trust the author.

Enjoy

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The roaring of the Void was loud, overpowering all other sensations as the two were swallowed up within it. Near instantly, the threads that had been binding the two deities together dissolved under the crushing presence of the blackened landscape. Erratum felt as though their body was attempting to split apart, trying to give under the wasteland that had pulled apart many unlucky travelers before them. They couldn't hear Ink's screams anymore, surely swallowed up in the depths of the Void. It was unbearable, and at any moment they were doomed to fracture apart entirely.

A pained grin made its way onto Erratum's face as the environment suddenly shifted at a dizzying rate, leaving nausea in its wake. Both deities were soon suspended in a new darkness, though they could see one another now. Ink gasped in horror as he stared at Erratum, who was currently shuddering and trying to keep from falling apart.

"Wh...what did you do? You... you threw us into the Void! You *killed* us!" He was trembling at the mere thought.

Erratum huffed a weak noise, a sound of relief washing over them briefly before burning shot through their system. Ink could only watch as the Guardian was engulfed by a shapeless mist of white, said Guardian's mouth opened in a silent scream. It only lasted for a few minutes, but it felt like another eternity of burning ascension to Erratum. They gasped in relief as they were released, body stabilized for now as glitches and pixels jumped from their body rapidly.

"Hah... we aren't dead."

Ink seemed confused by this, feeling entirely out of his element in this vast darkness. He tensed more as they were suddenly descended upon by more bright beings, all of which held no true shape. They felt like condensed magic, and some even felt familiar to the creator. One, in particular, seemed to approach him, the feeling almost like a hand caressing him rested upon the blackened spot on his face. The creator couldn't stare too long, feeling a burning sensation in their sockets when they did, and the burning on their face receded as the form pulled away.

"My wonderful creation,"

Ink tensed at these words, recalling them very clearly. They had been crystal clear since the day Erratum had pulled forth the memories in his mind, which he supposed truly *were* his memories now. "You... who are you?" He breathed, glancing frantically around. "Who are *all* of you??" He continued shakily, uncomfortable with how relaxed Erratum was among them all. The beings formed a circle around the creator, further intimidating him.

"We are the Guardians of the multiverse. We have shaped its beginning,

maintained its form, and blessed champions with the ability to carry out our wills." One being spoke, though Ink could hardly tell where it was coming from.

"Fate,"

"Destiny,"

"Time,"

"Faith,"

"Hope,"

"Karma,"

"Order."

Ink spun around, which was more of a weak flail in the air, to glance back at Erratum. The Guardian gave him another pained smile and Ink could tell their presence here was somehow agony to them. "What...?" He whispered, desperately confused and frightened.

"What a very foolish, reckless thing you pulled," Destiny spoke, sounding somehow displeased through their echoing voice. *"With no prior warning! You really* could *have perished!"*

"It had to be a secret." Erratum replied boldly, refusing to bow to their outrage. **"You would have stopped me if you knew what I was planning. You would have forbidden or even closed off the Void to keep me from doing it."** They frowned sharply at the group of them. Ink had no idea how they could stare at these shapeless beings for so long and not be entirely blinded. **"So, I found myself at an impasse. I launched a plea to all of you, leaving my Fate in your hands, and I did what I had to."**

The celestial group remained silent for a moment, appearing to consider these words. Karma spoke first, ever one to defend their actions. *"While dangerous, it was creative thinking, briefly passing through the Between via the Void."* They sounded somewhat pleased despite the brash actions. Erratum huffed a weak sound at this, their body slowly recovering from the trip and excess magic. The god suddenly stilled, however, as a tugging sensation pulled at them. They glanced back, as though there was something other than blackness around them all.

Nightmare.

He was pulling his bracelet. He needs them.

"Not yet," Erratum turned to face the group again, soul aching heavily. *"We must still discuss the situation at hand."* Fate insisted, sensing the Guardian's rising anxiety and desire to leave. *"It is what we have been trying to do for years."*

"He must be punished. He must atone." Destiny echoed out, bringing a chilling sensation to the creator. Punishment? Atonement?? He had no idea what any of them were talking about and, frankly, it sounded as though he were moments from being torn apart molecule by molecule. Ink gasped as Erratum was suddenly in front of them, frowning sharply at all those surrounding the two. Were they... were they *protecting* him? Erratum must have sensed his disbelief, glancing back at him with a faint smile.

"**You didn't think I'd leave you at their mercy, did you?**" Erratum laughed quietly at the expression on his face. "**You don't deserve further punishment or atonement. These aren't things you need; *I* know what you need.**" They continued insistently.

They faced forward once more, their displeasure locked back onto the other Guardians. "**You have the absolute gall to stand before me**

and declare retribution? When it is *your* collective actions that have led us here?" They demanded. Ink was a little nervous by how direct they were, but he supposed the god was equal to these terrifying beings. **"Since the moment he was *created,* truly from the moment the first interference was introduced into the multiverse, everything has been a disorganized mess. Chaos has bequeathed more chaos and I am breaking the cycle*, right now.*"**

"*You-*"

"Yes, I *do*." Erratum immediately broke in as Time began to speak. **"I *do* have the audacity to speak to you this way; I have *earned* that audacity in my countless centuries on that multiverse."** They scowled a bit. **"And I'll be *damned* if I hear otherwise on the situation."**

Ink could see how each being seemed to flinch backward, obviously displeased and offended by their words. Or, perhaps particularly, *one* word. Ink didn't blame them; he had never heard the Guardian swear before and, frankly, it was a little terrifying.

"There will be no retribution. It is my decision, as well as Erratum's, alone. The domain falls to us." Karma declared for the Council, appearing moved by the Guardian's decree.

"There is nothing to be punished!" Faith chimed in as well, backing the other Guardians.

"There is still Hope for you!" Hope included as well, somehow even imperceptible beside it's twinned being.

"Erratum?" Ink muttered quietly, assuming they were speaking about *Errata,* as he knew them. Perhaps that was just a shortened

version of their name? Ink supposed it didn't matter when his life was on the line.

"Good," Erratum approved with a soft smile. **"Please... Fate, I ask you to remove the Muses. The suffering ends here and, while this blessing has become a punishment, it is unsuitable and inhumane."** They directed their attention to said being, who slowly approached the both of them once more.

"You... you can get rid of them?" Ink breathed softly, feeling a dull sensation of Hope in his paint-depleted body. "Wait... you *gave* them to me. You... you said you made me... but you did this to me." He whispered, seeming conflicted. "And... and you *left me* in that horrible place. That... that white room." He shivered, arms wrapping around himself in anxiety. Erratum braced a steadying hand on his shoulder, reassuring him that they were here and ready to defend him.

"I know," Fate spoke quietly, perhaps a bit of regret bleeding into their tone for the first time. *"This is all my fault; it is my mess. The interference, the balance, your incomplete existence... all of it falls on me."* They admitted softly. *"When you fell into apathy after Dreamtale, I had blessed you with creative Muses that were supposed to guide you when you felt lost. I'm not sure what happened, or why it became so torturous and demanding. As for your creation... I was careless. I'm the reason your soul shattered, why you don't remember my instructions and, thus, were unable to leave. While your world creation was slow at first, the Muses increased your rate rapidly and put the multiverse at risk. It is true; there is limited space in the multiverse."*

Ink couldn't believe what he was hearing. The balance nonsense, which he supposed *wasn't* actually nonsense, was true. The overcrowding risk was *real,* as unbelievable as it sounded, and his unchecked creation had been causing suffering. Not so much to the beings of the multiverse, not yet at least aside from the collided universes, but to the balance. To *Erratum.*

Ink faced Erratum once more, eyes wide as he seemed to plead with them. "I'm... I'm sorry." He managed after a moment. "I-I didn't know... I didn't mean to hurt people. I never wanted to! I never meant to make your life so hard... I-"

Erratum stopped him immediately with another squeeze on his shoulder. "**Ink... you're correct, you had *no* idea. Your actions had consequences, absolutely, but accountability must be given where it is due. You were misguided and by the time I was shaped into what I am now, your beliefs had already been instilled and the Muses had already taken hold. You have nothing to be sorry for, especially toward *me*. I challenged every belief you had, and at times I was unfairly spiteful and vengeful toward you. Honestly, I should be asking for *your* forgiveness.**"

Ink stared at them a moment, appearing entirely bemused by their speech. "*My* forgiveness? You... you never did anything for a bad reason. I thought you were just some megalomaniac with a god complex attempting to control the multiverse. You weren't though, and you... you did everything you could to try and help me. I know you did." He smiled weakly as he suddenly embraced the surprised Guardian, pressing his face into their shoulder. Erratum wrapped their arms around him as well, gold magic floating from the ley lines on their face in this endless void.

They pulled apart after another moment, Ink appearing a bit sheepish for his sudden action. Erratum turned to Fate again a moment later. "**As for why the Muses became what they are, I think I know why now.**" They admitted, much to their surprise. "**Karma,**" At their call, said being descended upon them once more. "**You placed your judgment, your mark, upon Ink after Dreamtale had fallen apart.**" Erratum recalled with a small frown. "**It was only very recently were we aware Fate had marked Ink as well and bestowed the Muses.**"

"They changed from helpful entities to some sort of twisted punishment." Karma realized, seeming to be horrified as well. *"This was also my doing... I feel shameful for being a part of this cycle of suffering."*

"**You had no idea. That is why my own passing of Karmatic judgment has nearly ceased.**" Erratum admitted quietly. "**The punishments I *did* see from you, no offense, we're just... senseless. They were not helpful to push them to atonement. While I have only passed judgment twice myself in all my existence, I find it hard to decide who *truly* needs it.**" They glanced at Ink for a moment with sorrow. "**Clearly, my own judgment isn't always the best either.**" They shook away this thought, glancing back up to the beings. "**Please... remove your marks and free him from his suffering.**" They petitioned the gods, watching as Fate reached forward first.

Ink felt a jolting sensation down his body, as though something had been cauterized off of his body. It was an unpleasant situation, and twice as much when Karma did the same moments later. With their touches, however, the creator suddenly felt as though a presence had left. He felt... *alone* in his body. It was a sensation he never knew he didn't have until now. Erratum appeared pleased beside him, feeling a weight lifted from their own shoulders.

"**Now... for the remaining problem,**" Erratum managed to open an extremely glitchy window, cringing as the rest of their body began to pixelate as well. They managed to pull an object from the screen and quickly dismiss it, shuddering as their body convulsed. Karma surrounded them once more, bringing that burning pain back to their body again.

However, Ink began to writhe in pain as well. The pain felt like it was coming from nowhere, but it ached in his body horrifically. If this was a fraction of what the other was feeling, he couldn't fathom how they could calmly take such anguish. It finally died away as Erratum was released, who panted softly as they looked to Ink. The artist rubbed his sternum harshly, feeling a lingering burning sensation.

"**I really Hope that doesn't have underlying consequences...**" Erratum muttered as they uncovered the object

cupped within their hands. Ink stiffened at the sight of the shattered and crudely put-back-together 'soul' they held. It was washed in violet magic, familiar magic they distantly noted, which was probably the only thing keeping the pieces from scattering. Ink met their eye a moment later, opening and closing his mouth without finding the words to say. "**This is your soul.**"

Ink trembled as he held his hands forward. "C-Can I... can I hold it?" He whispered softly, thanking the Guardian profusely as they handed it over to him. The creator stared down at the broken essence of his being, tears managing to work their way into his sockets. "It's... it's so broken." He breathed, feeling cheated once more seeing it right before his eyes. "Is there... anyway...?" He was hesitant to ask, afraid of the answer.

"**That's what we're here to figure out.**" Erratum assured, earning another grateful look from the artist. Erratum glanced to the other Guardians who had already taken to deliberating among one another. "**Nightmare...**" They swallowed a lump as the name stung their throat. "**He stated that a strong magical source, preferably of the soul owner's own magic, had the best chances of forcing the soul to accept each piece once more.**" They didn't know *how* to go about that, however. They weren't certain what kind of magic Ink could influence on his soul when it had never been a part of him before. Would it even work?

They were pulled from their musings as Time gave a sound akin to a sigh. *"Another is passing through."* They announced, much to Erratum's surprise. Did someone else leap into the Void after them? Surely not. Surely none of them had been foolish enough to try and follow after them. They *really* didn't want to think of all the potential candidates who *would* do such a thing.

However, before any of them could react, a soft 'blip' of noise revealed...

A small white dog?

"**It's that annoying dog again,**" Erratum muttered with a slight glare. "**Must you follow me everywhere? Even to the depths of the multiverse and beyond?**" They were a little exasperated, but their expression changed to one of confusion as the other celestial beings began to surround it.

"It can't be so..."

"Where have you been?!"

"Why do you look *like that??"*

Erratum furrowed their browbones as the Guardians fussed over this dog, clearly not understanding. "**You speak as though you've known this creature forever.**" They remarked with interest.

"We have," Time explained, sounding as though they were also marveling as well.

"Erratum," Karma seemed to breathe a whisper of a laugh.

"This is Magic."

Erratum was certain they hadn't heard that right. *Surely* they had misunderstood what they were saying. This *thing,* the dog that had appeared at random moments in their life, had been *Magic* the entire time? And they never *told* them??

"Yip!"

"What do you mean *you go by 'Toby' now??"* The Guardians appeared just as befuddled as Erratum was.

Then a thought occurred, causing Erratum to gasp suddenly.

"You!" They shouted, pointing to the white dog that was slowly losing its solid shape in this vast space. It looked more like a floating pile of goo at this point. "**You're the reason I hear these voices, aren't you?? You... you *bit me!* After you bit me, I started hearing them!**" They seemed indignant as they accused them. "**Did you pawn off the multiverse on me?!**" They couldn't believe this.

They couldn't *believe this.*

"**Magic! Or... Toby... whatever!**" The god growled as they clenched their fists. "**You didn't even offer any *guidance* to me! You just... thrust me into this position and washed your hands of the situation.**" They felt, once again, entirely abandoned by the Guardians.

The dog began to bark at them once more, but Erratum just glowered in response. "**You know I don't understand you.**" They frowned as

the creature floated toward them, earning a disgusted shudder as its goopy form touched their face for a moment. "**Please stop. I hate this, even.**" They pleaded before the deity dog backed off again. It began to bark at them once more, but now, the Guardian seemed to understand them.

"**You're telling me there was *nothing* you could do? As *Magic.***" The god didn't seem to be buying this. Magic, or... Toby?... continued to bark their response back to them. Ink looked extremely confused at the sidelines, not certain what was going on anymore. "**...I suppose I can see that.**" Erratum relented. Toby had claimed while Magic was a firm foundation in the multiverse, there wasn't much else they could do aside from limiting Ink's Magic. This posed another problem, as that meant he wouldn't have enough of his own Magic to push the soul pieces together.

When Toby had transferred powers from their domain to Erratum, it was solely to assist in their work of Order. It gave them the ability to hear the multiverse, *see* the multiverse. They had been able to summon firewalls, screens, and Verse after their encounter with the celestial mutt. They had done what they could to assist them, but that still didn't excuse their lack of communication with them. Erratum was certain they would never understand why the chaotic Guardian never explained, but at this point, they were simply happy to see them.

"**Do you plan to assist in putting the soul back together?**"

"Yip!"

"**All right then...**" Erratum turned to Ink, who was still giving them a wide-eyed look. They didn't blame him; this whole thing was bizarre and the only reason Erratum was so calm was because they were so used to it. "**Are you willing to trust me?**" They questioned the nervous creator. "**Are you willing to allow me to try and help you put yourself back together?**"

Ink gave an enthusiastic nod, even going so far as to offer his 'soul' out to them. Erratum felt relieved that he was willing to trust them; that should make this the tiniest bit easier. The god nodded once as they floated back into his space once more, guiding the broken 'soul' to rest in the small space left between them. Erratum glanced over their shoulder a moment, seeing Toby had pulled themself back together and was hovering nearby.

"**All right... I need you to work with me now, Ink.**" They advised him firmly. "**Whatever you feel, don't push it away. Don't reject it or... I'm not sure *what* will happen, actually.**" They admitted, causing the artist to shiver at the thought. "**Whatever magical reserve you have, just... *force it* out. Concentrate on the soul and just... focus on pushing these pieces together. I will try to be your conduit by amplifying the Magic with my own. It might hurt, it might not, but I need to know you won't stop at any point unless you are told to.**" They watched his face intently, seeing the nervous expression. He had a resolve to him that eased Erratum's fear however as he nodded. "**Okay... here we go.**"

Erratum felt the ley lines across their body ignite, their eyes and mark of Karma flaring brightly. Ink would have been intimidated if it weren't for the fact this powerful god was on his side. The artist slowly brought their own hands over the 'soul', sighing shakily as he forced what Magic he had down into it. Erratum followed suit, flooding much more powerful Magic and intent into it. Ink wanted to convulse at the feeling, both painful and strange all at once. It was like his hollow chest was suddenly becoming filled, as though an invisible presence was going to break through his ribcage at any moment.

The minute their Magic had influx the soul, Nightmare's violet essence had vanished from it. Erratum felt themself sweating as they moved the pieces closer millimeters a minute it felt. They knew this was torturous to Ink, but there wasn't much else they could do to make it comfortable. Ink was quietly sobbing, gritting it out between clenched teeth as he continued to feed the damaged 'soul' what he could.

They were *so close* Erratum could *feel* it. They just couldn't breach that last point, and they couldn't figure out *why*. Their own Magic burned hotter, drawing a wail from the creator at the intensity. The Guardian felt terrible for putting him through this, but they couldn't stop now. Not when this was Erratum's last resort; not when they were so *close*.

Toby yipped over their shoulder, nearly making them lose their concentration. Before they could grit out any words, however, the dog seemed to leap through the endless space to Ink. The dog flashed its sharp canines before sinking them into the creator's arm. Ink let out a yelp of shock at the sudden pain, body going stiff a moment later. His eyes lit up a bright white colour, suddenly infused with his own Magic once more.

Erratum barely had time to process the events before their hands were suddenly no longer being pushed back, causing them to entirely capture the soul in their hands. Ink couldn't scream anymore, head tilted back in a silent wail as the Magic died away from his eyes. The Guardian quickly took their hands away from the soul, knowing their raw Magic had to have been excruciating against the fragile item.

They breathed out a quiet sound, shaky and shocked, as the construct floated in front of them. It was whole, it was *complete*. It looked a bit like a soap bubble, Erratum distantly thought, with the shiny surface, but it still seemed *empty*. They had an idea how to rectify this though. While Ink was trying to recover, Erratum began to swipe the vials that had remained tucked within his satchel. They noted silently that the other Guardians had said nothing at this point, but they were too focused to question it. The god uncorked the first vial, carefully tipping it to the swell of one side of the soul. The paint seemed to trickle in, securing itself within the bottom of the soul.

This seemed promising.

Erratum continued to work like this, switching vials and pouring until the vials were empty and the soul was full. They backed off after that, watching the swirl of colours coating the gentle soul. They looked up after another moment, searching Ink's face a moment. "**How do you feel?**" They questioned carefully.

Ink was weeping from where he hovered, hand clenching the front of his shirt tightly. "That... that's the thing." He whispered quietly in response, momentarily confusing the Guardian.

"I... I *feel.*"

Erratum felt as though all the stress in their body had suddenly been snatched away. The tension eased out of them like a balloon deflating its air, and they were at ease. They watched with a tired smile as Ink captured the floating soul once more, weeping as he took it in. Slowly, he brought it closer to himself, allowing it to finally merge with his body. Erratum gave a breathless laugh as Ink clung tightly to them, resting a hand against the creator's back.

"Well," Karma finally spoke up, sounding slightly uncertain. Erratum looked back at them a moment with curiosity, seeing that the entire Council had an air of apprehension. *"This was... unexpected."* Erratum was still confused by their words, looking back to Ink as he pulled away from them.

The creator was beaming brightly at them, the various tattooings they could see slowly pulsating a different colour every few seconds, fading in and out of each colour as an endless rainbow. The more Erratum was in his presence, the more *familiar* that presence was to them. The more *powerful* their magical aura seemed to be against them.

Uh-oh.

"I...did I do this?" Erratum questioned uncertainly, glancing back at the Guardians again with a bit of panic. There was silence for a bit, causing Ink to feel a sense of apprehension in his soul, and wasn't that just an incredible thought?

"I'm afraid the mixture between my direct touch, Magic's, and your incredible force of power and essence directly fed into the soul gave way to this outcome." Karma explained, seeming weary at the mere thought. *"Well, nothing to be done of it now."*

"It is your *responsibility to guide them now."* Fate spoke up with limited patience.

"I will... I'll guide him the way I was not." There was only silence in response to this. Ink cleared his throat a bit, capturing Erratum's attention once more. The artist was clearly anxious about whatever they were speaking of, knowing it was obviously about himself. Erratum only gave him a warm smile, moving their arm up in a slightly flexed position. Ink seemed a bit confused but followed the motion as they both firmly grasped hands together.

"You have ascended beyond the demigod status you had obtained. The powers that imbibe you now are celestial, the strength that can only come from a *celestial*." Erratum spoke with such conviction in their voice it momentarily shook the artist. **"May you use these abilities to help keep this multiverse alive, to help it remain in balance."**

"I don't understand..." Ink frowned as the god laughed quietly.

"Ink, Guardian of Creation."

The artist felt numbness for a moment, the shock completely overwhelming his body. They were implying that he was suddenly an equal to them, to all of these shapeless beings that surrounded them. Ink glanced at the shapes uncertainly, finding they no longer burned his eyes. "I-I... what... what am I supposed to do?" He questioned uncertainly. Erratum squeezed his hand again, however, bringing Ink's attention back to them.

"As I said, I will guide you. You won't be left to figure it out on your own again."

The promise was reassuring, causing him to relax the tiniest bit. He swept his gaze over all of them a moment, seeming hesitant to speak. "Can... can we return home, then? Back to the multiverse?" He questioned, the feeling returning to his body when they agreed.

"A moment," Erratum spoke as they approached the celestial beings once more. **"I have a request."** They felt it was something they were owed at this point after everything that they had done. The Guardians appeared to be listening, watching as they placed a hand over their own chest. **"This form is unstable... As much as you can pull me together here, that isn't something that can be done once I'm back in the multiverse. I'll break apart, and I'll end up right back here in the Between, my astral body freed."** They gave them all a sad smile, hoping they were understanding what they were asking.

"You wish us to bind you to the soul of this vessel? To the body of your former self?" Time seemed absolutely scandalized by the notion, but Erratum remained unmoved by it. *"Surely you understand that implication."* They continued, seeing how unbothered they were.

"You would never be able to return here physically," Hope agreed with a bit of worry. *"You would be within a soul, bound to that body. Even if you were to die, though that would be difficult, you would not return to be among us. You would be properly reaped and forever separated from the Guardians."*

"Are you certain that is what you want?" Karma included, needing to know for certain their answer.

"I understand what it entails. Ink falls into that same boat, as his body was not broken, but I elect to have this Fate." Erratum answered them firmly. **"Plus, I'm all right with possessing this soul. I... want to share this soul with another, and this is the only way I can."**

"Love??" Destiny seemed scandalized now as well.

"You would separate yourself from a promised existence of power and peace for Love??" *Fate seemed to finally agree upon something with Destiny, unable to understand why this would be the case.*

"You've never been in a physical body," Erratum laughed quietly at their shock. **"You've never experienced what I have, walking among mortals and lower deities. You've never felt what it's like to love someone the way that I do."** They teared up slightly, still feeling the tugs on their being every so often, though they had become weaker and weaker each time.

"Would they do the same for you?" Faith's question did not seem hostile, but genuinely curious. Faith and Hope both kept the twins as their champions, after all. Erratum didn't even have to think about this question.

"He would." They laughed quietly at this. **"He wouldn't even hesitate."**

There was silent deliberation for a moment before they were surrounded once more, feeling the radiant heat from their closeness.

"If that is what you want, then so it will be," Karma spoke as Erratum was lifted up amongst the others.

"So it will be." The others echoed in unison. Erratum felt a strange sensation in their soul, as though it were filling with an overflow of Magic. They wondered if this was how Ink had felt, though Erratum had felt *much* worse before. They endured it for as long as it took, suddenly feeling one with their being. They hadn't realized how separate they had felt from this body until this very moment, and they felt more at peace to feel like a single being.

Erratum glanced back to Ink, who was still staring on with overwhelmed confusion. The god laughed a bit at the new Guardian's expression, deciding to have mercy on him.

"Ready to go?"

Everything was blurry, but the grass underneath them was cool and refreshing. The brightness of the sun momentarily blinded them, causing them to raise a hand over their face to block it out. Erratum sat up after a moment, rubbing their head as they slid their discarded glasses back onto their face. They glanced behind them, noting their

altar was covered in flowers and candles burning in vigil. It seemed a little dramatic to the god, but then again, everyone had assumed they died.

Right! Everyone thought they were dead!

Erratum stumbled to their feet, seeing Ink beside them sitting on the ground and rubbing his head. He looked pretty much the same; long scarf, tight forming brown and white shirt, half-done suspenders, no shoes (as is superior, the god added silently), but there was no satchel around his body. The paints that he had normally carried were entirely absent from his body. That made sense considering Erratum literally shoved them into his soul.

They focused, taking a moment to find the power to call upon their champions. They were still so exhausted from fixing the artist's soul up. Still, two bursts of golden light responded to their call, much to their relief. Cross and Blue both appeared, looking around frantically for how they had possibly been called. "**You didn't think I'd *actually* leave you to do my job, did you?**"

The two champions snapped their head around at the voice, both of them swarming the Guardian immediately and clinging to them. Erratum breathed a quiet laugh, resting either hand on their heads. "**I know, I'm sorry. I couldn't tell anyone what I was doing or you would have stopped me.**"

"Damn right!" Cross choked out as he glared at them through teary eyes. "You *jumped,* Errata!" He emphasized firmly. "You... what were we to think? You... it looked like you just sacrificed yourself like we all *knew* you would do one day!"

"You idiot!" Blue cried as he beat his fist on their chest weakly for a moment. "You made us all so worried! It's been two days of suffering!"

He mourned, both relieved and entirely destroyed all at once. Erratum felt terrible for putting them all through this. They were quick to intervene as both caught sight of Ink, immediately brandishing weapons in response.

"**Wait, wait!**" Erratum insisted as they put themself between their shocked champions and the frightened Ink. "**There's no more conflict to be had, please. I need to gather everyone else to explain, but-**"

"*YOU,*"

Erratum froze, eyes wide as they glanced past the two champions. They immediately held their hands up defensively, trying to somehow placate the angry Geno as he crowded them. "**Geno, I-**"

"NO!" Geno hissed, cutting them off immediately while Reaper grasped both of his bonded's shoulders tightly. "You fucking don't get to do that! You don't get to pretend everything is fine after what you did!" He was obviously struggling not to cry, one hand moving up to grip Reaper's at his shoulder. "Do you know how it *felt* to hear that not even a *day* after I bonded my soul that you had *killed yourself??*" He demanded of them.

"**I wanted to perform the ceremony before I did this. You deserved that much from me before I did something so drastic. To be fair, I was pretty certain it would work.**" Erratum insisted, which didn't seem to sit well with any of them.

"PRETTY SURE???" Geno snapped, trying to pull from his partner's grasp a moment at their audacity. "I should shove your knitting needles *straight* up your-"

"Ah, let's be reasonable!" Blue insisted, having already contacted

Dream while the two had been arguing. Or more, while Geno had been chewing out the guilty Guardian. "We still have a lot of things to discuss." He glanced to Ink, looking slightly uncertain but trusting Erratum's judgment.

Erratum jolted as they were put in a near headlock, body bent down a bit from the height difference. "Ayyy, glitchmister!" Fresh grinned as he near choked the Guardian. "Had us all *crazy* broken up, man. Super uncool, like... *really* unradical." He frowned after a moment, shades blanking as he released the abused god. "We all thought you bit the dust for real, for real." He muttered, causing the god to feel even more guilty. They knew it would be like this if (when) they returned, but it didn't make it any less agonizing.

They heard Dream's portal before they saw it, turning to see the shaken-up spirit. He gasped the moment he saw Erratum, immediately sending a distressing signal out to his brother. "Errata! You're okay!" He whimpered, head-turning instantly as he noticed the creator. "*Ink!"* He wailed as he shoved past the slightly amused Guardian, nearly throwing himself at the creator. Ink seemed confused by his reaction, weakly wrapping his arms around him as he sobbed into his shirt.

"I...I don't understand. You should be afraid of me... I've done so much to you." Ink half whispered, confused by his obvious relief and delight to see him. His breath stuttered a moment as Dream looked up at him, that soft fluttering feeling running free in his soul now.

"Ink, you're... so *stupid."* Dream breathed a weak laugh at the pout it brought, only letting it die away when he felt something. Something that was resonating from the artist that he wasn't sure was real. He placed a hand against his chest a moment curiously, about to question him before a suffocating air of negativity nearly made his knees give out. Ink held him steady, watching as a dark portal opened up nearby.

Nightmare stepped through the portal, seeming listless and empty as he held the discarded section of Erratum's robe they had left behind around himself. He didn't appear to believe Dream's excitement when it had transferred to him, wondering what *he had* to be so enthusiastic about. He supposed it was simply the positive spirit in him, and his inability to accept many of the negative emotions within him.

"Nightlight,"

Nightmare froze, eyes wide at the sound of that voice. That couldn't be right though; he had seen them in their final moments, heard their last words. Still, he turned his head up to search for the source of the voice. Seeing the Guardian a few paces away still didn't feel real to him, and he would have dismissed it altogether as some wild hallucination if it wasn't for the comforting aura wrapping around him again. The darker spirit managed to move his shaky legs forward, slowly approaching them as though they'd vanish if he moved too quickly. Once he was finally close enough to them, his breath hitched.

And he put every ounce of strength and Magic into the slap he delivered across their face.

Erratum was entirely jarred by the sudden hit, glasses flying off their face once more. They found it stung and ached *way* more than it should have. Glancing down and seeing the bright violet Magic around Nightmare's hand, however, answered enough questions for them. They knew to stay quiet this time, waiting for the other to address them instead. It took Nightmare a few moments of heavy breathing to even process what he needed to say.

"You..." He managed after a moment, hands moving to clutch the discarded robe tighter around his body. "How... how fucking *dare* you." He didn't seem too bothered about swearing now, though Erratum could agree that they deserved every harsh word. "You... you *left* us. You left *me."* He continued weakly. "Do you... do you even know how much I was just... *shattered?* The Corruption

couldn't even fathom what it is I feel... I was... so alone. This agony it... I couldn't imagine having to live with it for the rest of my life. You had been with me just before it all happened. You asked me to *stay with you* for the night, knowing *exactly* what you were going to do the next day!" He sobbed, so deeply wounded he could barely even express it.

"**Nightmare,**" Erratum spoke it with so much regret and sorrow, knowing they had put him through way more than he ever deserved. "**I know... I know I was inexcusable in my actions. I couldn't tell any of you... I couldn't let you know. You would have protested, you would have sabotaged the effort to spare me.**" They glanced around at all of them, though they all still seemed betrayed at their actions. "**I told you that I would always come back to you, Night. I meant that.**"

"You didn't come when I needed you."

Erratum flinched at that, nodding momentarily. "**I know... I felt every time you called for me in the Between. It kept me grounded while I was there because I knew I had to finish what I started to return.**" They felt the spirit fight them a moment as they took either side of his face, pressing their foreheads together. "**I'm so sorry I hurt you like that... I don't expect forgiveness, and I really don't deserve it.**"

"Shut up you horrific martyr." Nightmare hiccuped, grasping weakly onto the god's forearms. "I...I don't care if we did this all wrong. I don't care if we've screwed up every step, done things backward, and just... flat out screwed it up." He suddenly spoke, gripping tighter onto their arms. "I love you, I love you so much I can hardly breathe." He managed, squeezing his eyes shut tightly. "I can't handle you leaving again... I can't take that pain. Please, I don't care if this is sudden and out of order, but I want to be with you. I want to give you my soul, everything that I am. You're my soulmate, I know you are, even without our souls being bonded." He glanced up at them again through his tears.

Erratum felt their own tears cascading down their face, knowing they had pushed him so far and into so much anguish, yet he still wanted to stay with them. They could hardly fathom that, but it did bring warmth to their soul. "**Nightmare...**" They whispered softly, voice shaky as they tried to pull themself together a bit. "**I love you, too. Night, I... I didn't realize until it was too late what had developed between us. I had already resolved myself to this plan and... seeing you hurt, seeing how close you and Dream got to being killed... I had to. I knew you would suffer for your affiliation with me, and so I needed to ensure you all would be safe. This was the only way I knew.**"

Nightmare stared at them, searching for any dishonesties in their face while they spoke. "You didn't even... you didn't even say goodbye. You didn't even tell me you loved me before you did it."

"**It would have hurt more.**" Erratum muttered back. "**It would have hurt both of us more.**" They knew if they had said it, if they had exchanged those words, the god may not have had the heart to go through with it. Nightmare merely clung to them tighter, desperately pushing their foreheads closer together. "**My heart, my soul...**"

"My Erre..." He sniffled, soul aching but alight all at once. He nearly dug his fingers into their bones as they started to pull away, earning a weak laugh. Erratum managed to force him back, staring down at him with a soft expression.

"**I need to tell all of you something, however.**" They turned their attention back to Ink, placing a hand on Nightmare's shoulder immediately as he flared with aggressive Magic. "**Ink? I think it would be better if you explained.**" Erratum insisted, too busy trying to fight back their partner's agitated Magic.

Ink glanced down at Dream, backing off a bit as he looked over the

group. They were all staring at him with distrust and disdain, which he couldn't fault them for. "I...I'm sorry. I didn't know about everything. I didn't *know* the things that I do now and I can't take back my actions, I know that. Much of this is going to eat away at me for the rest of my life, I know that too." He looked away dejectedly, moving to fiddle with his sash only to find it not there. He smiled weakly as he stared down at the empty space. "I didn't know how to express anything... I was hollow and run by forces way beyond my control. I still did terrible things of my own free will, I will own up to that, but I... I didn't know how bad they were."

Dream gave him a sympathetic look, seeming to sympathize for the artist. "Ink, we know." He assured him softly. "We know that wasn't you. *I* know it."

"And," Ink continued with a growing smile. "Errata helped me in... so many ways. Ways I can never repay them for." He was nearly teary-eyed, which surprised Dream by the palpable feeling of it.

"Good luck; they don't accept payments." Cross replied dryly, earning a few quiet laughs and one indignant huff.

Ink closed his eyes as he willed his essence forward, cupping the colourful soul within his hands. Several gasps tore through the group, Dream immediately right back in his personal space once more. He looked even more emotional than Ink did, hands trembling at the sight of it.

"They... they fixed it..." Dream whispered, watching as the new Guardian nodded. Dream hesitantly reached out to it, as though to test if it were real. He allowed his hand to hover close, drinking in the *genuine, real* emotions the other was experiencing. He stared up at the creator with wonder, his own soul light with happiness as their eyes met. He felt Ink's emotions suddenly shift under his hand from melancholy and joy to something sweeter. It was a mixture that made even Dream feel warm inside. A cocktail of joy, fondness, affection,

relief, and-

Goodness... was that all for *him?*

Dream looked a mixture of shocked and confused as he realized he invoked these tender feelings, though he wasn't sure the creator knew what he was projecting to him. He just gave him a gentle smile instead, dropping his hand back to his side. "You're so happy..." He spoke reverently as Ink allowed his soul to slide back into place. The spirit gasped as he was lifted up, much like Ink always like to do when he was excited, admiring him like an art piece.

"Of course I am!" Ink enthused, feeling even lighter as the spirit laughed in response to this. He gently let him down again after a moment, blinking in surprise when Blue suddenly threw his arms around his neck. He patted his back awkwardly, unsure what else to do. Once he pulled back, Ink gave him a befuddled look.

"Ink, I never wanted to leave my two friends!" Blue frowned at his look of disbelief. "We all had such great memories, we fought together as teammates and laughed together as friends. You started to lose yourself and... I couldn't take it anymore. I fought against you at first, but then I started fighting *for* you. We *all* did, even if we had to make you feel cornered in the end." He could see the relief in Ink's eyes as he said this.

"So... are we... still friends?"

Blue scoffed at the mere idea. "Of course we are! Geeze, Ink." He laughed with the two of them, feeling complete once more.

"That's not all we should talk about." Erratum cleared their throat, glancing away a moment. Nightmare knew that guilty gesture,

however.

"Errata... what have you done?" Nightmare questioned them suspiciously, frowning sharply at the obvious anxiety they began to emit. "Don't try to backtrack now, you've already started. Tell us what happened."

Erratum sighed as they began to thread their strings between their hands to absently toy with. "**Well... when putting Ink's soul back together, I had to imbibe a lot of my own raw Magic into it. Karma had already inadvertently done the same when they stabelized my body while I was holding the soul. Magic, yes the Guardian Magic, bit Ink-**"

"The... Guardian bit-?"

Erratum pushed past that. "**And returned the power they had stripped from him long ago. That all... well,**" They glanced to Nightmare, who was giving them a calculating look. "**I may or may not have ascended them to Guardian status.**" Whatever Nightmare was expecting, this was clearly *not it* by the look on his face.

"What?!" He sputtered, grasping the other by the arm tightly. "You...?? You just... *huh??"* He couldn't get his questions out fast enough, thoroughly stunned and confused. Of all the shocking things they had done, this was by far the most alarming 'accident' Erratum had managed.

"You're a Guardian?" Dream questioned, wide-eyed as Ink squirmed uncomfortably. "That's... that's incredible Ink!" He enthused, face brightening once more. Blue was giving Erratum his own exhausted look, seeming to understand the chaotic hell this new Guardian would bring to the multiverse. Not a bad chaotic hell, but just... *exhausting.*

"Heh, yeah... Guardian of Creation." Ink replied sheepishly, still feeling rather daunted by the large responsibility that gave him. He had protected the universes before, but now he had an entire balance system to watch out for.

"And we suppose you'll be teaching them?" Nightmare didn't sound impressed, one tendril finally emerging and wrapping around the god's arm. Erratum only shrugged back, earning another glower in response. "Excellent... that will surely go well." He muttered. "We think we need to get some other deities involved here; we don't want an Errata 2.0." He spoke.

"That's ridiculous,"

"It *isn't,* and you know it." Nightmare huffed back at them. He narrowed his eyes further as their hand came to rest against his cheekbone. "Don't think being all cute and affectionate *now* is going to lessen my disappointment."

Erratum grinned a bit at this, laughing quietly. **"I would never even consider the thought."** Nightmare didn't appear to buy that, but he still leaned his head into the touch regardless. He had been so sure the Guardian was dead and part of him still thought this was a giant dream or hallucination. Any touch they offered him was incredibly grounding at the moment.

"Well," Cross sighed, seeming to hold the same reservations Blue did. "Guess we better get the word going around, right?" He narrowed his eyes at Blue, who looked a bit sheepish. "No more war?"

"Mweheh... right." Blue glanced to Ink for a moment, who seemed to feel just as awkward at the reminder.

Those were words Erratum had been dying to hear for a while. It soothed the remaining fear in their soul, leaving behind a light feeling of unburdened happiness. Yes, *this* was happiness, they were certain of it.

Not content, not relieved, not momentarily reprieved.

Just... happiness.

Chapter End Notes

DID YOU REALLY.
REALLY THINK I WOULD KILL MY BELOVED CHILD. MY GOSH YALL. I COULD NEVER. *smacks tags and warnings aggressively*

Happy times all around; I could never break Nightmare and Erratum apart, I just couldn't. Ink deserved way better as well, and so I determined they both deserved to be happy. Both of them deserved to stand as equals.

For anyone wondering why "time" is never capitalized, it is because Erratum does not respect Time as a Guardian. lol

I wouldn't just leave yall HERE, though. The next chapter will be the final chapter (which holy shit???) and include some little things I'm CERTAIN many of you have been wanting to see. And do not fret; there will be a sequel.

- Your Agender Queen

Chapter 41: My Heart, My Soul

Chapter Summary

And, thus, there was peace.

Chapter Notes

Wow.

I really can't believe we're here. It's been exactly nine months since this story started. I have found it so hard to let go of this story; it's changed a lot of things for me, as silly as that sounds. I've met some incredible people through my readers and I have a discord server full of talented and friendly people.

This is not the end, of course. This is merely the end of this arc for Erratum and their new-found family. There are MANY things that have not been addressed that I know people want to see. Just watch for the sequel and all will be well.

So, for the final time:

Enjoy

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was no surprise that everyone needed some time to settle and talk through what had happened. Erratum had felt horrible every time one of them spoke, settled at their altar shamefully as the group took their separate turns. Nightmare's little group had shown up after Nightmare called for them and after one stabbing from Killer (and one healing from Dream), the group of monsters settled a bit away from the rest of them. They all appeared to be appraising the situation with varying levels of confusion and discomfort, though they chose to say nothing about it. They were all keenly aware of Nightmare at the moment, sitting sideways in the Guardian's lap while both of his hands grasped onto one of theirs. While the sight wasn't surprising in the least, it was still surreal to see their once angry and stoic leader nestled up and vulnerable with someone else.

Ink looked slightly confused when the large group looked at him, glancing around a moment. Dream laughed quietly as he leaned over to him a bit more as he sensed his growing discomfort. "This is the part where you talk about your feelings." He informed the newer Guardian, who appeared slightly more nervous now.

"I don't know how to do that." Ink informed him with a glance around the group. "I used to know *exactly* what I was feeling because I would, well, choose that feeling. It was all pretty straightforward, with no real fluctuations between things unless I physically chose it." He hummed a bit in thought as he said this. "Now I'm feeling all kinds of things and I'm not even sure what they are. They're more soft feeling than happiness, achier than sadness. The subtleties are really damn confusing." He admitted, watching Dream flinch slightly with confusion.

"Ink, Guardians don't *swear*. *Swearing* is literally translated to 'words that offend the gods' and... well," He gestured at him a moment, which only seemed to make him indignant for some reason.

"What?? That's not fair! Erratum swore right in the Guardians' faces! Well, their general direction at least since they don't really have a shape..." Ink protested in response to this injustice. He wasn't about to change his entire speech pattern to match Erratum's more formal manners. Dream appeared scandalized, however, as he looked over at Erratum next.

"What?? You what??" Dream seemed mortified at the imagery, but the darker Guardian could only give him a sheepish smile. "*Errata!"*

"Don't be so dramatic," Erratum waved off, though he could sense even Nightmare was giving them an intrigued look. **"It's the only time I've ever used such language, I promise."** They assured him, though it didn't seem to soothe him too much. **"To be entirely fair,**

they were pushing to punish Ink, and trust me... punishment in the eyes of a Guardian is way more severe than anything you could imagine." They frowned as they recalled how they encircled the confused creator.

Dream seemed to soften a bit at this, glancing to Ink a moment, who was looking away. "I didn't consider that..." He looked to Erratum with newfound respect as he did so. "You defended him? You put yourself between him and the most powerful beings in existence to not just plead his case, but flat out berate the other Guardians?"

"**As I'd do for anyone in that kind of situation.**" Erratum replied with ease, as though it had been no feat at all. "**While pushing back or being disrespectful to the other Guardians a thousand years ago may have been unfathomable to me, it isn't so much so now. I've recognized myself as their equal, and I have forced many of them to realize the same. There are a few that I do not respect as Guardians either, and they know very well who they are. It is no secret that I am, perhaps, the most rebellious of the Guardians.**" They shrugged, smiling the slightest bit as one of Nightmare's tendrils prodded the side of their face.

"Thousand...?" Dream seemed stuck on this for a moment.

"You never mentioned you were *that* old!" Cross agreed with surprise. "I always assumed when you said shit like 'centuries' or 'millennia' that you were being dramatic!" He rubbed his forehead a moment with a sigh. "I don't know why I did... you're hardly capable of sarcasm."

"**Why is that so hard to believe?**" Erratum protested at this. "**Ink is only a decade or so older than I am.**" They informed them, to which Ink nodded a bit in agreement. Dream turned his shock onto Ink now, who laughed at his stunned expression.

"What? Dream, I created these alternate universes! Did you think I did this in the span of thirty years or something?" He laughed at the others embarrassed sputtering. "You're cute, Dream." He informed him, which only earned further flustered sounds.

"Watch it," Nightmare spoke in a warning tone, tendrils waving a bit threateningly. Erratum breathed a soft laugh at his instant disapproval, moving their free hand to one tendril. The appendage immediately wrapped around their arm in a familiar fashion, dragging the spirit's attention back to them. "Stop doing that, you can't distract us from our rage." He informed the amused god. Erratum merely leaned down a bit more, grinning as the other immediately moved his head upward to meet their forehead with his own gently.

"You sure?"

"Shut up." Nightmare muttered back as his body relaxed a bit more at the gentle affection. The group collectively rolled their eyes, realizing this was behaviour they were all going to have to deal with now. No one really minded, but it certainly was embarrassing to be a witness.

Ink watched them for a moment, considering something quietly as he took in their affectionate actions. He glanced over at Dream a moment, who was giving a soft but exasperated look at the duo. He seemed to sense the creator's stare, looking back at him with a soft smile. Ink gave an equally gentle expression, admiring the way it made his soul flutter and project those subtle little emotions he could never recreate with his paints. Dream blinked a few times as he stared at him, flushing the faintest bit as he looked away in embarrassment. The brighter twin knew the other wasn't aware of how transparent he was being, and he did his best not to let it ignite any Hope in his soul. The other didn't quite grasp emotions, after all, and it could just be a misfire.

With a little work between himself and a reluctant Nightmare, he had Faith that the other would learn how to truly feel like the rest of them.

"Oh, right!" Ink suddenly spoke up, breaking the atmosphere and recapturing Erratum's attention. "What was that thing you did before we left? The soul binding or whatever you all were talking about." He clarified the other's confusion. Erratum glanced away a moment, a motion Nightmare was *far* too familiar with as he narrowed his eyes up at them.

"What have you done now?" He sighed, much to Erratum's instant anxiety. "Oh good, it must be something significant for you to be so avoidant and open with that anxiousness." He continued to press the other, knowing they were stalling. The Guardian sighed a bit as they looked back down at him, knowing he wouldn't let it go now.

"I bound my astral form to the soul of this vessel, of my former body."

The group seemed confused by this, many of them having no idea what they meant by 'astral form'. Nightmare seemed to realize there was something significant to this, however. "There's some implication behind that you're not saying." He accused the other. Erratum nodded a bit at this, sighing once more.

"I merged my immortal form to this mortal body," They explained further, feeling the jolt the spirit gave in response. **"My form wasn't stable after passing through the Void and into the Between. I would have broken apart the moment I returned here, and I would return to the Between with the others. Permanently."** They let that implication sink in a moment. **"But, I had already been planning to request the merge anyhow."**

"You gave up complete immortality??" Dream questioned with shock, eyes wide at their explanation. "I...I mean, you'd accomplished your goal, right? You had said you never wanted anyone to get close because you knew what would happen in the end."

"I merely gave my form a soul. The only thing that means is my body is no longer near impervious. I don't age, just as other deities don't, but I can very much die with a precise fatal blow." Erratum smiled the faintest bit at their obvious shock.

"Why?" Nightmare questioned next, seeming just as hung up on this. "Surely there would have been another way to stabilize your body! Why do something so *extreme?!"* He couldn't fathom the rash decision they had made. Erratum huffed another soft laugh at his obvious concern over their technical mortality now.

"I didn't really have a tangible soul to share with you, and that was something I wanted to do." It was so direct and, once again, mortifyingly blunt. Nightmare flushed in embarrassment, glancing around at the crowd that was privy to this rather intimate statement. As flattering as that was, it was also just as flustering.

"You...! Why are you so shameless??" Nightmare demanded at their casual admittance. "You're really going to sit here and tell us that you gave up such a high status for *us.* Not only is that extremely hard to believe, but do you know how ***embarrassing*** that is?" He remarked as he heard his boys snickering from their spots. Erratum laughed as well at his reaction, pulling him closer despite his weak shoves to keep them away.

"Well, that's the truth, Nightlight."

"This ceremony is going to be so *humiliating."* Nightmare mourned at the realization. The group couldn't help but laugh at this, knowing it was entirely true.

To say the Council and Erratum's followers were confused when they were all called into the same place was an understatement. None of them looked too comfortable with the others, especially the Council in regards to Storyshift Chara and Altertale Toriel. Both volatile judges seemed to overpower the presence of most of them and refused to be intimidated. They didn't have to wait too long before a flash of gold revealed the two Guardians.

Many of the members looked confused to see them both in the same room and not immediately at each other's throats. Erratum could sense this by the looks on all their faces, glancing at the nervous creator a moment before back to the divided crowd.

"**I'm more than pleased to officially declare this 'war' over.**" They shot a look at Blue, who kept his hands behind his back and looked up at the ceiling innocently. Erratum shook their head as they glanced over to Dream and the obviously uncomfortable Nightmare, who was subjected to quite a few hostile looks from the opposite side. "**Just as positivity and negativity are in balance, so too is creation.**" The Guardian turned to Ink, offering their arm up a moment. Ink grinned as he grasped onto their forearm, Erratum following the same motion.

The group let out a collective sigh of relief at this information. They were able to intermingle once more, muttering apologies and attempting to reconnect with the opposite side once more. Erratum appeared more than pleased at this, nudging Ink a bit to remind him. The creative Guardian frowned a moment, staring blankly back at them. Erratum gave him a flat look and grasped the other's wrist, bringing the artist's hand up so he could view the various strings tied to them.

"Oh! Right, right." The artist was still having issues with his memory despite his new soul. He assumed it was simply an effect of going so long without one, but he was remembering much more than he ever had in the past. "I also wanted to say something!" He informed the lot of them. "With some errors on Erratum's end-"

"Excuse me-?"

"I've also been ascended to Guardian status. It was a side effect, basically, to this," The artist happily revealed his soul to the group, looking exceptionally proud and hopeful as he displayed it. There were many surprised murmurs and double takes at this reveal.

"Well, I'll be damned," Red commented first, glancing between the two Guardians and back to the soul. "Guess miracles really do happen after all." He glanced to Outer, who was corralling himself back down into his seat after momentarily losing grip on gravity.

"I guess this means we can lift all the bans? No more barring others from worlds or embargos?" Sci questioned, nervously pulling at his jacket. He had been caught in the middle as a resource that many people had been closed off.

"Embargo?" Erratum appeared shocked by this statement. **"How far did things progress while I was busy actually fixing things??"** They noticed the lack of response, sighing in exasperation. They glanced down as Nightmare moved to their side, Ink having flocked back over to Dream and Blue again.

"How does it feel to be the one constantly exhausted by others' rash actions?" Nightmare smirked, tendrils swaying with obvious amusement behind himself. Erratum gave a huff of indignance at this, knowing the other made a fair point. "Now *that's* Karma." He grinned at their obvious displeasure. Erratum did laugh a bit at this, resting

one hand against his face and bringing him up to nuzzle their nasal apertures together. The lull in conversation drew their attention back, causing the Guardian to break away to glance at the crowd. They were all watching with varying levels of confusion, surprise, and disgust in some cases. Nightmare seemed to realize where they were again and flushed brightly, attempting to hide his face from them all.

"Oh right! And they're getting married or whatever." Ink called out, just as shameless as the darker Guardian.

"It's called soul bonding, Ink." Dream sighed in exasperation. "I guess that's close enough..." He snorted a bit at how embarrassed his brother was by the open display of affection he had participated in. Honestly, though, it was about time those two got it together.

Erratum made a soft sound as they released the ashamed spirit, having had their own memory jogged. "**Speaking of Karma,**" They started, waving Ink over once more. The artist glanced back at Dream a moment, who only nudged him forward encouragingly. Ink slowly made his way back to the other Guardian, wringing his hands together nervously. Karma never seemed to go well for him. Erratum seemed to sense this as they placed a hand on his shoulder. "**For quite a long time, I used my abilities to pass judgment on others or remove marks from them. Never had I considered how necessary the other side of Karma was. While bad Karma is easy to instill, good Karma is just as essential, especially to those who need it most.**"

Ink frowned in confusion, obviously not understanding. He winced the slightest bit as the god's grip tightened on his shoulder, though he said nothing of it.

"**With no risk of blending marks together like before, I instill this upon you not as judgment, but as a blessing.**" They smiled warmly at the surprised look on his face. "**Wherever you go, with each experience you face, may Karma always be in your favour, and may each day bring you closer to the life you never got the**

chance to have." Ink appeared emotional, something that was simply incredible just to be able to see after all this time. **"And so it will be."**

After the pain faded from the jolt of Magic, Ink threw himself once more against the other with quiet words of gratitude. The Guardian merely patted his back before he pulled back from them. "I...I don't deserve that, I really don't." He insisted, despite how the other dismissed it. "If there's anything, *anything* in this multiverse I can do for you-"

"Well," Erratum started, looking thoughtful a moment.

"There *is* something I believe we can both do."

Experimenting with universal code and Ink's newfound creation powers yielded incredible results.

While Erratum could not alter stories in universes, and Ink could not change many details and wipe slates clean entirely, their combined powers gave way to possibilities that were seemingly endless. There were hiccups along the way, a few messes they both had to untangle with the help of a displeased Verse, but they soon found a harmonious blend that allowed them to completely change worlds at their will. Erratum had entirely thrown out the notion of not interfering as they had originally intended a thousand years ago; having now become the Guardian who had interfered the *most* with this multiverse. The irony did not escape them, but it was worthwhile to see the results.

There were so many people, so many people they loved, who deserved their painstaking efforts.

"Cross,"

Said champion had looked to the Guardian curiously, seeing them standing rather pleased with an equally excited Ink. Normally, this would make him rather nervous, but there was something about their attitudes that filled him with something other than apprehension. He nodded at both of them, encouraging them to continue on.

"You have never asked me for a thing throughout your time here. You have only offered to protect me, and have done so without so much as a word of protest. I never asked for such loyalty, and even after making you my champion, your will never wavered even a moment." Cross appeared sheepish at this, hunching down a bit and rubbing the back of his neck. **"Though you have never asked for anything but a home, I never felt I quite gave that to you."** They rose their hand immediately as Cross opened his mouth. **"As much as I can offer you here in my realm, it would never truly be your home. It was never the home you once had."**

"So," Ink cut in, tired of the stalling the other was doing. The build-up was great, but Ink was impatient as could be. "With some discussions, some editing and uh... taking some *things* out of the story... my bad, by the way..." Ink's grin turned a bit sheepish as well as he said this. "We have put everything into place. If you'd let us, or well, let Erratum I guess," He glanced to the opposite Guardian a moment. "We'd like to give that back."

"If you should want it, I will take you back to your universe. Once I force reboot it, it will once again become viable. There will be *no* suffering, either. None of what you went through, while you will always carry the memories of the experiences, will have happened. It is the *very least* I can do." The god watched the various emotions flash over the champion's face, seeming to take in

this information all at once.

"You...and everyone will...?"

"Yes, everyone. Well... minus one, perhaps. The Void always has vacancies." Erratum shrugged in response, smiling as Cross grasped at their robes tightly. **"I know, and I'm sorry it took so long for me to be able to-"**

"Shut up! You do all of this unbelievable shit and then you have the nerve to apologize for not doing the impossible sooner!" Cross wept as the Guardian rested a hand on the top of his head. "Can... can I go now? Please... I want it back. I want it all back, even if its destruction was my fault." He whispered softly. The Guardian nodded once in response, a rift opening up to the white vacant world. Ink had diverted his attention away, clearly not comfortable with the endless white space. "I'll still... remember everything, right?" Cross checked before stepping through.

"Of course. We aren't wiping it as a clean slate." Erratum assured him, much to his relief. The guard nodded once at them, glancing at Ink as well after a moment. The creator still wasn't looking in his direction, pointedly looking away. He smiled faintly before disappearing through the rift back into his destroyed world. Erratum gave him a kind smile before they ran their hand over Verse, rebooting everything and running the program anew. They closed off the rift soon after, allowing Ink to look back again with a weak smile.

Once everything had stabilized enough, both Guardians reentered the world to view the end result. The scenery had turned from a blank white void into the proper scenery and world that it once was. Ink breathed a sigh of relief, strapping Broomie to his back once more. The both of them continued further into the world until they once again found the champion, staring down another being across from him. Cross still had the golden markings up the right side of his face, but so too did Chara. The human had instantly taken stock of their

body, sighing heavily in relief at finding they were once again tangible and, most importantly, *free.*

"How come *you* get *three* champions?" Ink complained as he glanced back at Erratum. The god merely shrugged in response, slightly amused by his whining tone. Cross turned his head at their voices, beaming brightly as he nearly bowled Erratum over entirely. The god felt a lightness in their soul, seeing him so happy and finally back where he belonged. Chara moved to give them a quick glance over as well, nodding once in approval.

"You wanna fix this champion thing then?" They questioned, watching the god tilt their head to the side in confusion. "C'mon, we both know you didn't *actually* mean to also make me a champion. It was a side-effect from being trapped in this idiot." Chara gestured to Cross, who only glowered back in response.

Erratum seemed genuinely confused by this. "**That's preposterous.**" They remarked at their claim. "**The both of you have worked together as one, but you are two entirely separate beings. It is no mistake that you were both marked, believe me.**" Erratum could see the doubt on their face, which turned into an annoyed glare as the god's hand found its way atop their head. "**Your tenacity and determination make you more than worthy.**" The god watched Chara consider these words for a while before they scoffed and smirked a bit at them.

"If you're so sure, then I would gladly continue to serve in your name." Erratum seemed pleased by this, unable to respond as Cross grasped onto their arm suddenly and pulled them along. He excitedly chattered about meeting his brother and his friends, and the god could certainly not deny him.

The three of them exchanged looks with one another, as though assuring they had all heard the same thing.

"So... you can just fix everything? Like that," Killer snapped his fingers to emphasize his point. Nightmare was standing beside Erratum, doing his absolute best to remain passive in the face of this conversation. "You and Ink can just alter everything... make it so this shit doesn't happen? Give us new stories. New lives?" He wanted to be certain they clarified all of this.

Erratum nodded in response to his question. "**There is a catch to it, however,**"

"Of course." Dust muttered under his breath.

"**If you choose to return to your worlds, with all the changes we've made and to remove all the suffering from you, you would be wiped clean. Your memories, your experiences, all of it will be brought back to zero.**" Erratum watched how each of them tensed, understanding this implication. Erratum had discussed this with Nightmare and, despite how much it obviously hurt the spirit, he agreed that this was something they all deserved after everything. He would not fight them if they went.

"No... famine?" Horror questioned, seeing the other nod.

"No manipulation?" Again, the god nodded at Killer's question.

"No endless genocide?"

"I'm uncertain how much clearer I can make 'clean slate' and 'new life'." Erratum frowned at their pestering questions. **"If you do not return, you will be entirely separated from your universes. You will no longer have a world, and the universe will self-correct by creating a new 'you', so to say."** The god warned all of them. The three of them continued to look amongst one another, taking each of these things into consideration.

Killer glanced up at Erratum before turning his attention on Nightmare beside them. The spirit was standing firm at the side of their partner, and Killer realized what he was doing. He felt obligated to give them this new life, even if it would destroy him to lose them. He never directly said it, but they all knew how much he cared for all of them. Dust and Horror seemed to be thinking similar things as they looked at Nightmare. The spirit gave them all a weak smile, nodding his head once to encourage them that it was okay, that he wanted them to go. The three of them exchanged looks once again before turning to Erratum again.

"Nah," They responded in unison, surprising the Guardian significantly. Nightmare seemed caught off guard as well, staring at them in confusion.

"We...I don't understand." Nightmare stammered after a moment. "Isn't this what you wanted? I took you in when you needed me most. When you had lost everything, from your homes to your minds. You can have that back though! I've done everything for you while you recovered and now I can let you go again." The words twisted in his soul, but he knew he had to push them to go. "I know I wasn't always the best, I know the Corruption even made your lives a living hell at times, but I *really do* want what's best for you."

"What gives you the right to decide what's best for us?" Dust questioned with a raised browbone. "No offense, but you can barely let *yourself* have what's best for you." He informed the confused spirit. "I've got issues, yeah, but the shit I get from Sci now makes things

easier. Erratum already took away everything else that haunted me. I can be content knowing *that* Papyrus will never have to experience what I did to the other."

"Yeah, and not much would change on my end." Killer shrugged back in return. "I'd basically be a classic which, no thanks, not after all the shit I've experienced. Sure I've got a shit soul that makes my body kinda shit, but that's something we're working on too. Don't tell me you're so unconfident with your abilities that you don't think you can find something for these Magic storms?" He watched the other puff up a bit with indignance at this very claim.

Horror rolled his eye at all of them. "Can we... not? No use... pretendin' this isn't... because we don't wanna... forget. This *is*... home. 'S been home... for a long time." He could see the confusion shift to disbelief on Nightmare's face. "If we go... you'd be devastated... we know that. Even with... everything you have now. We might be broken... and we may never be truly... 'okay'." He continued, struggling to get through his sentences. "I might... have my home back, my Magic stronger... my head undamaged, but... 's not the same anymore. 'S not... somethin' I thought about. Leaving." He admitted honestly. "If everyone else doesn't... go hungry, then I'm happy. That's all... I really wanted. 'M okay with who I am now. Took a long time... but I am."

Nightmare glanced at all three of them before looking up at Erratum again. He seemed at a loss for words at the moment but soon recollected himself. "I don't understand... why do you all keep choosing me, *us,"* He emphasized as his tendrils curled inward. "Over something so much better? Something I could never give you?" He just couldn't fathom all of their decisions. The answer seemed so obvious, but every time they had chosen the opposite of what Nightmare would have expected.

"Psh," Killer waved off, looking slightly embarrassed. "You heard Horror. I'm not gonna repeat all that stuff, but he's right. This is our lives now and it really *isn't* that bad Nightmare. You act like you're somehow forcing us to stay here when we all know we could have left

a while ago. Even though you were ruthless in the beginning, you'd have let us go if we chose to leave. I know you would have, especially if you thought it was what would keep us the safest."

Dust crossed his arms, attempting to look indifferent. "I can't kill no matter what life I choose to live. My levels will drop here, and I already know whatever world *they* created would make me a soft no-leveled loser." He stated firmly, much to Erratum's slight offense.

"Yer all still... doin' it." Horror growled at them for their hesitancy to say it. "Nightmare... you mean more to us than... just someone who's housed us. More than... some deity or king... you're our family. We're all... family." Horror grinned as he pulled the other two closer in near headlocks, which both of them struggled against.

"**And I love you, so of course, I would choose to come back to you.**" Erratum informed him as well, seeing how emotional the other was becoming. "**Don't sell yourself short, Nightlight. You mean more to this multiverse, and us than you take credit for.**"

"Srk... *Nightlight..."*

Nightmare chose to ignore Killer's snickers, trying to accept these words as reality. He never thought he could have *any* of this. He was a monster, a negative being, he was lucky he had even escaped his universe with his life. He had done things that he could never atone for, had dust and blood on his hands that he could never wash off, and became the monster the villagers had always made him out to be.

"**Your mind is incredible, but it's also your biggest tormentor.**" Erratum spoke as they rested a hand on the back of his neck. "**You're making that face again. The one when you're trying to convince yourself that you're undeserving of anything.**" Nightmare felt entirely called out, glancing up at their

knowing expression.

"But I am..." Nightmare emphasized himself once more.
"I *am* undeserving of such genuine kindness. Such... honest love, both romantically and familial." He insisted, feeling a tendril come to attempt to wipe his tears away.

"Aw, c'mon," Killer spoke as he swiped his arm quickly under his sockets. "Yer gonna make my eyes start leaking hate again with all that talk." He informed him. Horror made a whining noise at this, knowing very well that Nightmare put himself below the rest of them. He nudged at the other two, who gave him an uncertain look as he forced them forward more. Nightmare watched them with confusion, stiffening a bit when Dust and Killer held onto him from either side. Horror squished all four of them together at his front, looking pleased.

"I..." Nightmare breathed, both tendrils immediately moving to wrap around the group. He crumbled further as Erratum leaned down the slightest bit and embraced them all from behind. The spirit pressed his forehead against Horror's shoulder, breaths coming out in sharp gasps as their gestures tore the vulnerability from his body. He could tell by their emotions that everything they said was true. They were all devoted to him in different ways and he couldn't fathom *why*. He found himself slowly letting go of that thought as he leaned into all of them.

Perhaps the why didn't matter.

"You are *way* more relaxed than I thought you would be." Dream

remarked as Nightmare stood in the garden archway. Horror had been more than delighted to spruce up his rather massive garden at the back of the manor for them. Nightmare had been insistent that it be in their home world, as much as he despised the memories it held, and nature-themed. Erratum had allowed the other to take the reigns on everything, still confused by the entire process despite having blessed one.

"Of course we are," Nightmare remarked as he adjusted his white and gold robes appropriately. "Errata basically gave up their status to be with us, Dream. Nothing is going to shake our foundation and make us believe they would change their mind or that this is too soon to do it."

"I mean..." Dream trailed off as he considered *exactly* how fast they had gotten to this point. "You two didn't even *finish* the steps." He laughed quietly, much to Nightmare's irritation.

"Don't be stupid, of course we did." Nightmare dismissed his claim. Dream seemed surprised, glancing at the golden bracelet still around their wrist.

"But... I didn't see any mark on them. Did you mark them with your Magic?" Usually, the marking was significant by where it was placed. The one Reaper left on Geno's neck suggested playful affection, which Dream knew was quite accurate.

Nightmare seemed rather pleased, however. "Of course we did. It's just somewhere many of you won't see, which we prefer. Call us envious or possessive but," He shrugged a bit. He could see Dream's still questioning stare, causing him to roll his eyes and tap at his sternum a moment. Dream seemed to gasp, scandalized by this while Nightmare laughed. "You act like it's a cardinal sin, Dream." He teased him.

"B-but!" Dream stammered with embarrassment. "It's so... *intimate.* I wish you hadn't told me now." He complained while Nightmare huffed out another amused sound.

"We're sure whatever you're thinking is not the case. It's not just *that,* but a strong declaration, one of near reverence, which is fitting for them." Nightmare informed him with a rather proud expression. Dream still felt this was *extremely* intense, but he supposed that did summarize their partnership pretty well.

"Are you nervous about experiencing thousands of years of their memories and experiences when you bond?" Dream questioned him.

"Dream, there is only one thing we are worried about,"

"These notecards are in order, right?" Ink hummed as he read over Dream's neat writing again to refresh his memory.

"And it's *that."*

Dream laughed a bit at his obvious disdain. "Nightmare, you're bonding with a Guardian. The only one who can do such a blessing is *another* Guardian."

"Why can't they do it?" Nightmare glowered at the white dog settled in a reserved seat on the right. Dream looked from the dog back to Nightmare, entirely perplexed by their statement. Nightmare realized neither Erratum nor Ink had explained the dog. The only reason Nightmare even knew was because he dragged it out of the other. "Dream, that's Magic."

"What??" Dream sputtered as he quickly looked back at the dog again. The white dog met his eyes a moment before winking. Dream whirled back around to Nightmare with a look of disbelief. "And you didn't *tell me?!"*

"Honestly, we forgot." Nightmare admitted, glancing up the grassy pathway and straightening a bit. "We got a little distracted."

Dream took this cue and shoved everyone into their places. Nightmare held in a snort at his frantic movements, knowing Erratum truly wouldn't care one way or another if they simply skipped this entire part. Dream returned to Nightmare's left side, standing next to the rest of Nightmare's boys, beaming at him from where he stood. Erratum had dismissed the whole 'champions in waiting' thing and went with a more classic wedding-type alignment. Dream didn't mind, as it let him see the both of them from a perfect angle. He could hardly believe the Nightmare he had fought so hard for so long was standing in waiting for his soulmate. It seemed almost surreal now.

Once again, several Temmies came bounding down the center pathway with baskets of flowers. Nightmare had been reluctant to allow these *things* to even be here in the first place. The Temmies tumbled into one another at the end of the aisle, kicking up a small puff of leftover petals. The spirit rolled his eyes as they all untangled themselves and rushed away to their spots. He perked up once more as he spotted Erratum's two champions guiding them forward.

Erratum looked slightly embarrassed, finding it even more stressful to be on the receiving end of this ceremony. The god was wrapped in white, the hood of their veiled cloak not offering any comfort as it was basically see-through with little golden stars and moons on it. Extravagant golden body jewelry rested over their shoulders in delicate laces of gold. Dream had absolutely vehemently forbidden the other from going shoeless, much to Erratum's displeasure. The best the spirit had gotten from them were barefoot sandals that wound up the ankle in a delicate floral pattern. It was certainly no shoe, as it had no sole or really *anything,* but Dream had eventually caved.

Ink had refused shoes as well, after all, and he was the damn *officiate.*

The soft white fabric of the veiled cloak delicately swept petals up as it trailed across the ground. The god felt like half the damn multiverse was here to witness this event, which only served to make them feel more uncomfortable with the near thousands of stares. The Guardian looked toward the rose-covered arch, however, and felt a bit more at ease. They wanted to laugh at the expression on Nightmare's face, hoping someone had taken a picture at some point.

Nightmare was enraptured as the other was brought to stand before him. Blue and Cross offered Nightmare a small nod and a smile before returning to Erratum's side with Fresh. The spirit glanced back to Erratum, taking their offered hand with near amazement. Erratum seemed further embarrassed by this, but he couldn't help it. "*You're absolutely stunning."* He whispered softly to them, earning another fluster glare. They both momentarily turned their attention to Ink, who cleared his throat and read from cards sitting at a stand in front of him.

"Thank you everyone for coming to bear witness to the union of two Fated souls." Ink read off, face pinching a bit at the language. This was far too fancy for his normal taste, but he supposed this was supposed to be formal. "None have ever born witness to a Guardian sharing their soul with another; none thought it possible with how they live. Erratum was dropped into this world, however, and captured many souls with their selfless kindness. One, however, they continue to hold and carry with them."

Yeah, Dream definitely wrote this, Nightmare thought quietly.

"Through their mercy, they freed Nightmare from himself-"

Definitely wrote this.

"-and immediately ensnared his soul far tighter than any they had tended to before. Though their lives have been difficult, and both were nearly separated from each other, their love has brought them here today." Ink stuck his tongue out a moment, as though disgusted any of that had come out of his mouth. One sharp look from Dream, however, and he was once again on his best behaviour.

Erratum turned to look at Nightmare again, preparing to speak.

"Nope," Nightmare immediately interrupted them. "We will *never* get through my speech if you go first. We can't talk and cry at the same time very well." There was a light round of laughter following this, and Erratum couldn't even blame him. They were a little touched that he was so certain he'd fall to pieces. A few tendrils swayed a bit, and Nightmare nodded at them. Erratum watched in shock as the corruption spread up his body, nearly engulfing him entirely. The crowd seemed surprised too, if not slightly afraid. Dream gestured to them all that everything was fine, though he too was extremely confused. Erratum, however, seemed to understand after a moment and their expression became tender at the sight of him.

"I really thought you hated me for quite a while." His voice had that deeper tone that Erratum recognized, confirming their thoughts that this was indeed the Corruption. "I'm the embodiment of evil, of all that is negative, and a positivity-consuming monster." He leaned against the hand that came to rest on his face, sighing quietly. "But you don't see us that way..." He seemed stunned by this as he said it. "You were never speaking just to him, to what was underneath. You spoke to *us,* the entirety of our being, and never shied away from it, not even when we did some horrific things. We hurt you quite a lot, but you still stand here for *both* of us." He moved to squeeze the god's free hand a bit tighter. "I thought you would destroy me when you found a way to restore him, but you didn't. And you promised that you would watch over him. You have always done good by me, always. I give my half of this soul, Erratum, to carry with you for the remainder of our days."

Erratum had significant lines of gold down their face as the Corruption receded, leaving Nightmare to blink back into awareness. He looked a little sheepish at springing that on them, but he could tell the other was actually quite touched by the gesture.

"My Erre," Nightmare sighed as he watched them with such affection. "Never in my life, never would I have imagined I would have something as special as this. The idea of someone wanting to carry a piece of a soul like *mine* was laughable. I was always told these things weren't for beings like myself, that I didn't deserve the positivity in the world. I began to believe that and I spited the world as it had spited me. Though I've not been completely returned to my senses for very long, I knew even before then that you were that special thing I was always told I couldn't have. The more you broke through the layers, the more aware I became, and the more I started to love you. You did *everything* for me, absolutely *everything.* You've gone through such lengths and given up unimaginable power just... just to be here." He silently cursed himself as Erratum gently wiped the tear away that had escaped him. "We did everything so *wrong,* too." He laughed softly. "You had no idea what you had done, and I had no idea how to react. It's so absurd thinking back on it now. I should have already known that you would never do things the *traditional* way."

Erratum shrugged slightly at this, neither confirming nor denying.

"Mhmm," Nightmare hummed with amusement. "Every second we spent together doing those rituals, however, was... beautiful. Most of it didn't go quite right, or something would happen that dispelled the atmosphere a bit, but it was very... *you.* Every time, you bared your soul to me a little bit more and, despite how much you didn't actually want it, you let me in entirely. I still have vivid memories of seeing you disappear over that edge, and I knew why you didn't want to let me in. You tried to spare me, spare my feelings, but it only made it that much *worse.* I hadn't said anything, I never told you how I felt or what you meant. It felt like, once again, everything was simply taken from me. That special thing was suddenly gone, and I had believed for two *agonizing* days that I really didn't deserve it at all." Erratum

couldn't possibly wipe away all the tears that brought, and they didn't think they could ever soothe that hurt. "But then you came back. You had done everything you said you would do, just like you always did. I was so *angry* at what you did even when I was so relieved to see you. It hadn't just been your own life you risked throwing away, but *mine.* I only exist because you brought me through the Corruption, and that existence has always followed closely with yours thereafter. When you were gone, I didn't know *what* to do with this existence. It felt meaningless with you gone, even with so many people around me that loved me. It could never possibly fill that massive void." He pulled their hand closer, pressing his forehead against the back of it. "You're here, though. You gave away your immortality to come back to me. I'll never fathom the kind of love you must have to do such a bold thing. Immortal or not, I want to be in every second of the life you live. I give you my half of this soul, Erratum, to carry with you for the remainder of our days. With it, you carry *both* of us with you." He exhaled shakily as he finished. That had *not* been what he had rehearsed, not at all, but it felt more genuine than any pretty words he could make.

Ink was leaning on his podium a bit, grinning stupidly at their entire exchange. Both Nightmare and Erratum jolted a moment at a gutwrenching sob from nearby. Nightmare gave an exasperated look at Dream, who was still trying to press his hand to his mouth to keep anything else from slipping out. Killer was snickering a bit as he gave the positive spirt's back a hearty pat in some sort of comfort. Blue looked embarrassed from his spot across from him, trying to pretend he wasn't associated with him.

Erratum turned their attention back to Nightmare again, seeing him visibly bracing himself. "**Night…my heart, my soul,**" They could have laughed at how his composure instantly shattered in response to this. "**When I was first created, though I may not remember my life beforehand, I certainly had no clue the kinds of things I would go through. The happiness, the heartbreak, the pain, and the well of sadness that this multiverse originally brought.**" They recalled how they had sat patiently for many years, content to let the multiverse thrive while they waited. "**I made one trip, and I had promised myself it would be the *only* one, into Dreamtale. Just like every other Guardian that interfered in this multiverse, I started a series of chain reactions that led me here. I had kept my**

heart shut off, keeping any interactions as a god to a mortal. That didn't exactly work out..." They grinned a bit, knowing how completely off the rails everything had gone. "**It led me to some amazing people, so I can't really say I regret it. When we first met, I wasn't sure what to think. I had already declared I would block your advancement into other universes. You exuded hostility and arrogance that I can still easily recall. Every time we interacted after that, however, showed me a slightly different side of you. Even when you invaded my dreams, you revealed to me unintentionally your protective nature for those you cared for. I took that moment to spare you from Karma's wrath because I knew there was something I wasn't seeing yet. When I finally revealed that little bit of you in our fight, I realized what I had been missing.**" They ran their thumb under his left eye, recalling how he had pleaded for them to help him.

"**That started a whole new chain reaction. When you were freed, I finally saw the little bits I had witnessed come together into a full picture. You weren't arrogant, but confident in your abilities, and still insecure in other areas. You weren't hostile, you were protective of everything you had because you'd lost it all before. I didn't realize I had already initiated something even before the bracelet incident. Something had already shifted in our interactions and it was no longer simply companionable and platonic. There were so many signs that I, admittedly, missed.**

"You? *Never."*

"**Hush,**" Erratum scolded the other slightly, seeing his mischievous grin. "**I think I had, subconsciously, always known. Nothing about how I behaved around you after that was quite platonic either. The gentle touches, the endearing names, simply every interaction was laced with something much more passionate than friendship. The sad part was *everyone* knew except myself. It was actually rather embarrassing when I figured it out for myself after so long. I immediately wanted to throw you out of the place you had taken residence, push you out of my soul entirely. I didn't want to have you so strongly attached to me when I knew I was going to pass through the Void because, let's be honest, we**

both know I wasn't sure I would come back." The sorrow in Nightmare's stare still burned them even now. **"Then I gave in. I couldn't push you out and I knew you would never let me go. You would hold me in your heart even if I shattered it by leaving. There was no stopping it, I knew it, so I selfishly pulled you in as close as I could get you without saying it. I couldn't say anything because my resolve would have waivered, and because it would have been that much more painful at the end."** Their expression brightened, melting Nightmare a little. **"But it *wasn't* the end. I petitioned the other Guardians and, though they were reluctant, they gave me the ability to return. Not only that, they gave me the ability to be able to share my soul with you. I was beyond words with joy when I returned."**

Erratum huffed quietly a moment. **"I didn't exactly expect the slap, but, I certainly deserved it. I knew I had put you through more suffering than you had ever deserved. The reality that you would still love me so deeply, deep enough to practically propose to me on the spot,"** Nightmare's face coloured a bit at this statement, obviously embarrassed. **"Was unimaginable to me. We had barely even begun before we decided to seal it permanently. But, you weren't wrong. I know you're my soulmate, who I'm supposed to be with. So, though I haven't really had it to myself too long, I give you my soul, Nightmare, to carry with you for the remainder of our days."**

Ink had begun to dissociate from how long they had been droning on. He managed to snap back into reality when he realized they were no longer talking, grinning as he straightened up again. He had begun to open his mouth again, but Erratum spoke up once more.

"Can we *skip* the whole sand bit, please?"

The group of followers snorted and laughed a bit at their request, knowing how much it truly unnerved them. Ink seemed thrown off, glancing at Dream for assistance at this. "Hold on, you threw me off." Ink admitted as he began flipping through cards. Nightmare's glare was burning through him, but the creator finally 'aha'd and continued.

They made a gesture and another person walked toward the couple. Chara, Cross's Chara, stood there with both rings resting on their cushions.

"Let these rings represent the bonding the couple will share with one another in private as a public declaration of their bond." Nightmare moved to retrieve the dark band from its resting place. "With the exchanging of this ring, you swear upon the Guardians above that you will remain at Erratum's side for the remainder of your life. Erm... even though they *are* a Guardian," He included with confusion. Nightmare merely rolled his eyes as he moved to slide the ring on their finger. He took a moment to admire it, looking so proud of himself before letting their hand go. "With the exchanging of this ring, you swear upon the Guardians above that you will remain at Nightmare's side for the remainder of your life. Again, Guardian, but whatever." Ink shrugged, earning a soft laugh from Erratum. The god slid the golden band onto Nightmare's finger as well, watching how he immediately admired it with disbelief. It made their soul squeeze a little harder, seeing how he seemed to be stunned that this was real.

"And so it will be." Ink mentally patted himself on the back for getting through the entire thing. "I present for the first time, not courter and their chosen, but the bonded soul that is Nightmare and Erratum. I think this is the part where you kiss?" Ink concluded, much to their embarrassment. Nightmare gave the other another glare until Erratum redirected his gaze back to them. The god briefly glanced at the attentive crowd, embarrassed once more as they blocked both of their faces with their long sleeve. Nightmare laughed a bit at the gesture but understood their discomfort with the situation. Erratum gave him another smile before leaning down the small distance to press their mouths together. The spirit seemed caught off guard, resting his hand against the side of their face for a moment. The Guardian lowered their arm once they pulled away, giving the crowd a helpless smile at their censoring. Dream was laughing between tears at the absolutely gobsmacked and dreamy look on his brother's face.

He managed to pull himself together again, glowering a bit at his twin. "Dream! You didn't even make it through the *ceremony!"* He griped at the other, who only wetly apologized between his tears.

The reception afterward was much smaller, thankfully. Only the closer members of their groups stayed behind to mingle in Nightmare's manor. Dream had continued to bawl the entire time, much to his brother's absolute mortification, but he finally managed to pull himself together under the intense negativity that resided within the spirit's manor. As Nightmare returned to Erratum's side, the Guardian moved to whisper something to him. He seemed to smirk mischievously, turning and taking the offered item from his partner.

Dream was wiping away the remainder of his tears when Nightmare returned. He had begun to apologize again but was silenced as Nightmare presented the bouquet to him. Dream sputtered a bit, face flushing a bright yellow. "N-Nightmare! Stop! No, you're embarrassing me!" He complained as Nightmare forced him to take the bouquet.

"Oh!" Ink spoke as he appeared beside the both of them, having watched their exchange. "I remember that one. That means you're getting married next, right?" He stated excitedly. Dream shook his head a bit as he looked at the artist.

"Again, it's soul-bonding. It's more permanent and meaningful than marriage." He spoke, clutching the flowers tightly and attempting to hide his face from the excited creator. Ink's face slowly took on a more thoughtful expression as he truly mulled over these words and their implications. He felt that soft flutter as he watched Dream poke his face out from above the flowers, suddenly finding it way less funny. He glanced at Nightmare briefly, who seemed to be regretting his choices by unintentionally encouraging this. They were saved from his scorn by Erratum, who pulled him away with a knowing look.

Nightmare stiffened a moment before nodding, taking their hand tightly.

Dream gave them a soft look as they slipped away, amused and endeared by their impatience.

Nightmare led the other to a room a few flights of stairs above them. There was a single window that illuminated a collection of soft pillows in the center of the room with moonlight. Erratum admired the small, intimate room as they were led to the center of it. They knelt down on the cushions properly, thankful the other had the foresight to prepare all of this. Nightmare knelt down in front of them and settled on a dark cushion as well.

Erratum could practically feel the anxiety pouring off the other.

"**Nightmare, relax.**" Erratum quietly laughed at his stiff posture. "**Everything is going to be fine, all right? I'm right here with you all the way.**" They reassured him, which seemed to help the slightest bit. They watched him take a deep breath, willing forward the dark core of his being. Erratum momentarily admired its strange appearance, looking over it just as fondly as they did the spirit. Erratum struggled a moment to pull forth their own, having never done so before. Finally, they gave a quiet sigh as it manifested in front of them. Nightmare watched the soul with interest, seeing a swirling almost misty presence within it. "**That is, quite literally, me.**"

Nightmare was shaken by this once more. This was the most vulnerable he had ever been in probably his entire life, and he could tell Erratum was having similar thoughts by how their hands shook. The spirit gently moved his hands forward, cradling Erratum's own. The Guardian looked back at him again, smile losing its tenseness as they did so. Both of them simply watched one another, allowing the souls to hover above their interlocked hands.

The first brush sent a livewire of sensations through their bodies.

Nightmare jerked a bit as he was suddenly assaulted with an overflow of thoughts, memories, and sensations, to the point he was practically overstimulated from the experience. He couldn't feel anything other than the sharp zings going through his mind, clutching tighter onto their partner's hands. He was jealous of how graceful Erratum looked, eyes closed as they moved through Nightmare's own experiences. He supposed the Guardian had suffered through much more intense things, however.

It felt like hours until the unbearable sensations stopped, melting into a feeling of wholeness like Nightmare had never felt before. It felt safe and protected, and he felt one with Erratum. The Guardian was watching him through hooded lids, their smile just as tender as before. "We...I don't know how I lived my entire life without this." Nightmare breathed, admiring their combined souls. "It feels like a part of me has finally come home."

"You always make things sound so intense." Erratum spoke in a hushed voice, letting the content feeling wash through their body. **"You're right... it feels whole. It's as though I've been living with a piece missing this entire time. I don't think I remember what that even felt like, not after this."** They knew their leylines were alight again, but they couldn't blame themself for their emotional reaction. Nightmare nodded his agreement, and Erratum could see the tears in his eyes as well. **"And I can feel how much you love me."** They whispered, as though they could hardly believe it.

"Is it half as much as I feel from you?" Nightmare whispered back, cherishing this warmth they both were able to share. He was finally looking into that box the other kept firmly shut, and while what lie within it was dark and ugly, the spirit merely embraced that part of the Guardian. Erratum gave a breath of a laugh as they leaned forward, their foreheads connecting in a gentle show of affection.

"Surely so, Nightmare."

Chapter End Notes

I waited until I finished the story to write these end notes.

This became way longer than I thought it would be, but there was a lot to address. I'm.
I feel kind of beside myself looking at this completed story. This has been everything that's pulled me through these last nine months. As silly as that sounds, it gave me something to hold on to when I found myself in very dark places.

I am so privileged to have been able to share this with all of you, for it almost never made it to publication. I can't imagine this piece just sitting on my laptop now. It's gained a new life of its own.

Don't worry, I'll update this story again when the sequel drops. Please do stick around for the next installment,

Cry Mercy.

Thank you so much.

The end.

Sequel: Cry Mercy

Chapter Summary

Oh boy it's here

Oh yeah

That's right.

It's time.

I hope you all enjoy Cry Mercy even a fraction of as much as you have ATM.

https://archiveofourown.org/works/42881700/chapters/107730042

Works inspired by this one

[Restricted Work] by candy_coated_eyes

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!